Humor in Selected Dubbed and Subtitled English Animated Movies: A Contrastive Study

MA Thesis

Submitted By: Somaya Gamal Eddin Ahmed

Faculty of Al-Alsun

Ain Shams University

Under the Supervision of

Dr. Shaker Rizk Taky El-Din

Professor of Linguistics

Suez University

Faculty of Arts

English Department

Dr. Asmaa Amin Ali

Lecturer in Translation Studies

Ain Shams University

Faculty of Al-Alsun

English Department

2019

Approval Sheet

Name: Somaya Gamal Eddin Ahmed

Title of the Thesis: Humor in Selected Dubbed and Subtitled English Animated Movies: A Contrastive Study

Degree: Master of Arts Degree

Examination Board:

Prof. Shaker Rizk Taky El-Din, Professor of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Suez University

----

Prof. Hesham Hassan, Professor of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Benha University

----

Prof. Nagwa Younis, Professor of Linguistics, Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University

----

Date: 12 September 2019

Grade:

Humor in Selected Dubbed and Subtitled English Animated Movies: A Contrastive Study

Name: Somaya Gamal Eddin Ahmed

Degree: Master of Arts Degree

Faculty: Al-Alsun

Department: English

University: Ain Shams

Year of Graduation: 2013

Year of Approval: 2019

Abstract

Among the controversies aroused over humor translation, it has been always debated whether subtitling or dubbing is more effective in reproducing a similar humorous effect on the target audience. The present study is an attempt to compare between dubbing and subtitling in translating humor in five animated movies: *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Monsters INC* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Shark Tale* (2004) and *The Incredibles* (2004). The study employs Chiaro's (2010) strategies of humor translation and Berger's (1993) glossary of humor techniques as tools of analysis within the theoretical framework of Vermeer's and Reiss's (1984) skopos theory of translation. This study proves that though dubbing may show more functionality than subtitling in translating linguistic humor, both modalities are ineffective in transferring cultural humor in animated movies. Except for some instances of audiovisual humor, technicalities of subtitling and dubbing may hardly have any direct influence on humor translation though they affect the general watching experience. Other factors such as the frequency of using certain translation strategies, the general translation quality of the movie on hand and the variation of Arabic adopted in translation may directly attribute to differences in performance among subtitled and dubbed movies.

Key words: humor translation, subtitling versus dubbing, audiovisual translation, skopos theory, animated movies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people without whose constant help and advice, this thesis wouldn't have been written. I would like to deeply thank my supervisor Dr. Shaker Rizk Taky El-Din for dedicating his time, effort and constant support throughout the whole journey. I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Asmaa Amin Ali for encouraging me to move on during all writing phases. I am greatly indebted to my whole family for just being there forever and always. Their support, care and encouragement have always been a great source of inspiration.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

AVT	Audiovisual translation
CA	Colloquial Arabic
IO	Information offer
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
SL	Source language
ST	Source text
TL	Target language
TT	Target text
VEH	Verbally expressed humor

List of Tables

Introduction

In audiovisual translation (AVT), humorous discourse presents one of the cases in which rendering the effect that a word produces is more important than translating the word itself. Thus, this study explores whether the translation of five English animated movies has managed to reproduce a similar humorous effect on the target audience. The success or failure of translating humor would be modeled as representative of the quality of the whole animated movies translation process. The difficulty of humor translation lies in the linguistic and cultural specificity of humorous discourse. It heavily relies on language-specific wordplays or cultural-specific references. Instances of humor presented in audiovisual products can be even more problematic due to being anchored to visual or auditory elements. This study investigates whether subtitling or dubbing is more successful in overcoming the difficulties of humor translation and producing a target text (TT) that reflects the same sense of humor originally evoked in the source text (ST).

0.1.   Objectives of the Study

This study aims at (i) comparing between subtitling and dubbing in the translation of instances of humor in animated movies, (ii) identifying whether the difficulty of humor translation is attributed to linguistic or cultural aspects, (iii) classifying translation strategies employed in humor translation, (iv) investigating whether the humorous effect of the source text was successfully reproduced in the target texts, (v) spotting any instances of translation loss of humorous elements in the target texts and (vi) stating the reasons why humorous elements are successfully rendered or lost in translation.

0.2.   Research Questions

➢ Which humor techniques are most dominant in animated movies?

➢ How far can verbally expressed humor successfully travel in translation?

➢ Which type of humor imposes more difficulty in translation: universal, linguistic or cultural?

➢ What are the types of audiovisual humor used in animated movies? How does translation deal with them?

➢ Which translation strategies are more dominant in subtitling and dubbing humor?

➢ Which one of the two audiovisual modalities, subtitling and dubbing, functions better than the other in humor translation?

➢ To what extent do the limitations and advantages of each translation modality affect humor translation?

0.3.   Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it penetrates a neglected area of research using inventive links between previous contributions in both translation studies and humor research. It could be suggested that no specific attempts have been made to conduct a study on humor translation applying the rules of skopos theory. Moreover, the study aims to examine many controversial issues concerning AVT that are still left unsettled. For example, no criteria have been established to guide translators to use which modality of AVT in which translation case: dubbing or subtitling. It has been also debated which type of humor shows more difficulty in translation: linguistic or cultural humor. Another controversial issue is to what extent the advantages and limitations of the

AVT modality used affect the translation of verbal and non-verbal humor. The study shall attempt to analyze these problems by examining the translation modality and strategies that best transfer verbal and non-verbal humor. In other words, the success or failure of translating humor would be modeled as representative of the whole animated movies translation process.

0.4.   Chapterization

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter one is subdivided into two major sections. The first provides a summarized review of previous contributions to humor research in general and humor translation in particular. The second tackles the theoretical background which is subdivided into three sections: skopos theory of translation, humor translation and subtitling versus dubbing. Chapter two includes a detailed description of the methods of data collection and procedures of data analysis. Chapter three includes the analysis of instances of linguistic, cultural and audiovisual humor and their subtitled and dubbed versions in the five animated movies. Chapter four is concerned with the findings of the analysis, the contribution of the study and the conclusion that can be drawn from the results.

Chapter one: Review of Literature and Theoretical Background

This chapter discusses previous related research attempts and the theoretical basis for the present study. It is divided into two main sections: review of literature and theoretical background. The first section is subdivided into two main sections: modern linguistic theories of humor and translation studies of humor**.** The theoretical background is subdivided into three pillars: skopos theory of translation, humor translation and subtitling VS dubbing. It explains the rules and basic concepts of the skopos theory, the difficulties of humor translation and the limitations and advantages of the two basic audiovisual modalities: subtitling and dubbing.

1.1.   Review of Literature

Humor studies have penetrated different fields of research. For example, psychology has a long history in humor research (Raskin, 2008, p.3). Topics such as humor and personality, the sense of humor measurement, influence of humor on emotional health, learning benefits and social relationships have always concerned psychological scholars (Raskin, 2008, p.3). They have tried to highlight the psychological factors that stimulate laughter and the effects that humor has on psychologies of all parties in a humor communication. In addition, philosophy has contributed to humor research through the early works of Aristotle, Plato and Horace (Attardo, 1994, pp.18-34). A more modern contribution is offered by John Morreall who highlights the effect of humor on boosting morale during seminars and workshops (Raskin, 2008, p.4). Surprisingly, medicine has also played a role in humor research by examining the effect of humor and laughter on human physical health. As for linguistics, it has made a grossly overrated entry into humor research that started in the late 1970s–early 1980s (Raskin, 2008, p.4). Though

some other theories date back to classical ages and Renaissance, they are somehow descriptively inadequate as they do not attempt to explain the phenomenon itself and rather mix a description of it with some explanatory attempts (Attardo, 1994, p.46).

1.1.1. Modern linguistic theories of humor

Attardo (1994) categorizes three families for modern linguistic theories of humor: cognitive, social and psychoanalytical (p.47). The three families correspond to the three well-known approaches of humor research: incongruity, superiority and release. These three approaches examine and characterize the complex phenomenon of humor from very different angles (Raskin, 1985, p.40). Raskin explains:

> The incongruity-based theories make a statement about the stimulus of the speaker; the superiority theories characterize the relations or attitudes between the speaker and the hearer; and the release/relief theories comment on the feelings and psychology of the hearer only…However, these theories are not incompatible; rather, they adequately supplement each other. (p.40)

In other words, these three approaches do not provide opposing views of the phenomena but rather complementary ones that adequately examine all its sides.

The first family is cognitive theories of humor manifested by incongruity and contrast models (Attardo, 1994, p.47). Incongruity theories are based on the assumption that humor is triggered by a sudden realization of incompatibility of a concept with normal or expected patterns (Attardo, 1994, p.48). Humor primarily plays on creating an incongruous situation or idea that defeats the expectations of the hearer. One of the most