Humor in Audiovisual Texts: Translation Issues (Based on the American Comedy *Sixteen Candles*)

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Abstract: The article presents a study on the problems of translating humor by taking the American comedy *Sixteen Candles* by John Hughes as an example. The original and its three translations (two voice-over translations and subtitles) in Russian were compared and analyzed in detail in terms of humor in verbal and non-verbal interpretation. In some cases, we offered our own translations. Conveying humor is still one of the most difficult tasks in audiovisual translation; it is often related to specific cultural peculiarities reflected in the speech of the source language speakers and the speakers of the target language. The relevance of the paper lies in the need for further research on the means of creating humor and the problems of its preservation in translation. The goal of the paper was to study the verbal and nonverbal means of creating humor in a particular comedy film, as well as to analyze and assess the effectiveness of their transfer in Russian translations. The following methods of data analysis were employed: comparative-contrastive analysis, linguistic analysis, lexicographic analysis, situational analysis, and functional-stylistic analysis. The study revealed some losses in translation usually caused by unjustified lexical replacements (mainly generalization), a change in the word's register (for instance, using a neutral word for a slang word), and resorting to outdated vocabulary. Besides that, translators often ignore non-verbal, situational means of creating humor and their influence on the verbal description of the situation.

Keywords: Comedy; Audiovisual text; Verbal means of creating humor; Non-verbal means of creating humor; Situational humor; Dynamic equivalence

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies, including cable, satellite television, and DVD, and the proliferation of terrestrial television channels, digital TV packages, and online video resources, guarantees the widespread availability, rising popularity, and increasing demand for audiovisual products. In the modern world, technical means of transmitting visual-verbal information seem to be an integral and natural part of everyday life, and audiovisual communication is becoming one of the products of the international market, which causes a high demand for the translation of imported products. In this regard, research in the field of audiovisual translation is attracting increasing attention from linguists.

Modern audiovisual art is characterized by genre diversity. Researchers distinguish such genres as

movie novels, dramas, melodramas, crime shows, western, fantasy, horror movies, disaster films, military, documentaries, historical, adventure, and, of course, comedy, which will be the subject of this study.

The main characteristic of the comedy genre is that it presents the viewer something in a satirical or humorous light. Since film comedy is a special genre of film art, it should be analyzed within the framework of the main approaches applied to films in general. According to these approaches, a movie is a polycode text. There are many designations of a polycode text. However, linguists most often operate with such notions as "film text" [1-3], "media text," [4] "creolized text" [5-8], and "audiovisual text" [9-11]. The term "audiovisual text" has recently become the most popular term for polycode text, and this term is used in this study.

An audiovisual text is a complex, integral, informational message, including auditory and visual and verbal and non-verbal elements [11]. Non-verbal components fulfill technical, informative, and aesthetic functions. The technical function is the creation of a visual perception of the text, the informative function means translating the content of the text, and the aesthetic function is the actualization of the author's artistic intention [12]. Consequently, the content in an audiovisual text is formed through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal elements, transmitted through visual and auditory channels of perception.

Comedy is always based on a mismatch: something with something. For example: expectations with reality, expectations of one person with the expectations of another, and ideas about a person with the person himself. In a comedy, there must be some amount of absurdity, something must go against the usual rules and schemes. Comedy is created when connections between things, people, and concepts are either not what is expected or destroyed [13].

In the available studies, attempts to classify the diversity of forms of verbal humor are reduced, for the most part, to generalizations based on the types of stylistic means used in the language game (puns, allusions, hyperboles, etc.). Sometimes the ways of creating a comic effect at different levels of language are considered comic effect at different levels of language (comic effect at the level of words, sentences, phrases, and dialogic unities) or playing with different types of linguistic meanings [14,15]. At the same time, many classifications have a mixed character, i.e., they combine diverse comic phenomena into a single classification with no generalizing criteria and division into genres, forms of expression, and means of humor.

The most detailed classification of verbal and non-verbal means of creating a comic effect is that visual, musical, and kinetic means are involved in the creation of nonverbal humor. Verbal means are divided into linguistic and non-linguistic. In the first case, the achievement of a comic effect depends entirely on the linguistic realization or linguistic mechanism underlying the humorous utterance. In the second case, the comic effect lies outside the boundaries of language, and language acts only as an intermediary and is used to convey the meaning; for example, by breaking logical connections [16].

Some scientists distinguish situational means of creating a comic effect besides traditional verbal and non-verbal means [17-19]. In cinemas, the notion of "situational comicism" is first associated with the genre of situational comedy (sitcom), in which extralinguistic means play an important role in the creation of comical situations. It is not the dialogue itself that is funny, but the video sequence, in which the characters become participants in unforeseen circumstances like demonstrating atypical behavior for a particular situation, performing funny body movements, wearing ridiculous outfits, etc.

Lilienthal makes a very important remark in his work. Analyzing the essence of

situational and linguistic humor, the researcher notes that the situation and verbal means of creating a comic effect are mutually conditioned: The situation created in the dialogue influences the choice of linguistic means; and linguistic means, in turn, influence the development of the situation, its vision [20].

Translating audiovisual texts to achieve a comic effect is highly regarded, mainly because of the verbal

techniques employed in the source language and the cultural nuances that contribute to creating humor for native speakers [21]. Since the main purpose of a comedy film is to make the viewer smile and laugh, so it is necessary to achieve "dynamic equivalence" with the translation. There are two types of translation equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. However, only the pursuit of the latter allows the translator to select the most accurate variant of the original unit of communication in the target language in terms of impact on the recipient's emotions [9].

The main objective of this study was to analyze both verbal and non-verbal means of creating a comic effect in a particular audiovisual text, as well as to critically analyze and evaluate the available variants of their translation in Russian. The novelty of the study is determined by the fact that this is the first study that analyzes the translation of *Sixteen Candles*.

2. The main verbal and non-verbal means of creating a comic effect in *Sixteen Candles* and the ways of their transfer in translation

As already mentioned, the present study was conducted on an American comedy, *Sixteen Candles* (written and directed by J. Hughes). The movie is set in the suburbs of Chicago. The protagonist, Samantha Baker, on her sixteenth birthday, feels like the most unhappy person in the world. Because of her older sister's wedding, no one in the family remembered her birthday. On the same day, her annoying grandparents arrive at the Baker home and force her to go to a school party together with an exchange student. Just when it seems like things could not get any worse, at the dance, she has to get rid of Ted, the annoying "nerd" who has suddenly taken a liking to her. Deep down, Samantha hopes that this will be the day her greatest wish come true, which is to get the attention of a handsome high school senior, Jake Ryan. Throughout the film, the characters find themselves in various funny situations, their speech is saturated with humor and sarcasm, which manifests itself in an endless series of jokes. In addition, slang is often used in their dialogue, which is always difficult to translate. Specific examples will be discussed below. The translation options are labeled with the numbers 1, 2, and 3.

Hoping to attract Jake's attention, the protagonist of the movie does not even realize that the young man has already noticed her interest in him, and he likes it. In one of the scenes, he tells his best friend about the girl:

"*It's kind of cool, the way she's always looking at me.*"
"*Maybe she's retarded.*" *Jake's friend guffaws cynically.*

Table 1. Translations of the dialogue between Jake and his friend

Translation 1	Translation 2	Translation 3
"*I see the way she looks at me, and I like it.*" "*Maybe she has a squint?*"	"*She looks at me a lot, and it turns me on.*" "*Maybe she's retarded.*"	"*She's staring at me, and it turns me on.*" "*Maybe she's unfulfilled.*"

Difficulties arise when translating the adjective "retarded." According to the definition provided by the Cambridge Dictionary, "retarded" means having a slower mental development than other people of the same age. The meaning of the adjective is most accurately conveyed by the second translator, although the first translator also retains the original meaning. The third translator uses a colloquial adjective, which sounds too rude, and therefore the comic effect is lost.

The grandparents, who have not seen their granddaughter for several years, notice her transformation into a young woman upon meeting her at the wedding. The grandmother observes this change, while the grandfather

playfully mocks her in an ironic tone:

"*Fred, she's gotten her boobies. I'd better go get my magnifying glass.*"

All three translators managed to convey the grandfather's joke

Table 2. Translation of the grandfather's joke

Translation 1	Translation 2	Translation 3
"*And she has breasts, Fred. I think I'll go get a magnifying glass.*"	"*Fred, she's growing bumps. I'll go get a magnifying glass.*"	"*Fred, she's got breasts. I should arm myself with a magnifying glass.*"

The first translation requires a lexical addition, e.g.: "*She's already got breasts.*" Then the answer could be: "*I'll go and get a magnifying glass to see.*" The third translation is probably the most successful, because the phrase "armed with a magnifying glass" sounds more comical.

Often, the comicality of the characters' speech is enhanced by a visual component. For example, one of the characters in the movie, a "nerd" named Ted, behaves with extreme self-confidence when dealing with high school girls but no one takes him seriously because of his age and his comical appearance. Ted says that he is the king of geeks and misfits, but he is not giving up hopes of being among the most popular kids in school.

In a scene at a school dance, Ted tries to show off to his friends by trying to win over Samantha with his dancing:

"*I'm blowing your mind, aren't I? I'm just getting warmed up.*"

In this example, the situation itself is comical because of the discrepancy between the character's speech and his appearance and actions.

Table 4. Translation of Ted's dialogue

Translation 1	Translation 2	Translation 3
"*Am I driving you crazy? I'm just warming up. What's next.*"	"*Am I driving you crazy? I'm just getting warmed up.*"	"*I got you hot, didn't I? And this is just the beginning.*"

All three translations are adequate, but the third translator again uses the outdated colloquial verb "got you hot" in the translation of the teenager's speech.

Consider another example where nonverbal means enhance the comic effect of the situation. At the dance, Long Duck Dong meets a girl who stands out from the others because of her height and athletic build.

"*I bet all the boys chase you plenty in the school, huh?*"

"*Nobody's caught me yet.*"

"*Hmm. I betcha you big teaser, huh?*"

"*No. I run the 40 in five flat.*"

Translation 1	Translation 2	Translation 3
"*You must have all the boys are chasing you.*" "*Only no one's caught you.*" "*Is that because you're hitting them?*" "*No, I run the 100-meter dash in ten seconds.*"	"*Everybody's probably hitting on you.*" "*No one dares.*" "*You like to tease the guys?*" "*No, but I'm a champion in running.*"	"*I'll bet the boys have been giving you a hard time, haven't they?*" "*But so far, none of them hit on you.*" "*Do you like to play hard to get?*" "*No, but I'm a good runner.*"

In this example, the phrase "I run the 40 in five flat" is used, which is difficult to translate. 40 yards is the standard sprint distance in the United States. The heroine

means that she runs the 40 yards in five seconds.

However, Russian-speaking viewers do not need to understand these sporting subtleties in order to grasp the comicality of the situation. In addition, the first translator made an unjustified semantic substitution and translated the verb "to tease" as "to beat," which destroys the logic of the dialogue, and as a consequence, the comic effect is lost. In our opinion, the most successful one is the third translation, which successfully utilizes the commonplace vocabulary of communication of Russian-speaking youth.

Thus, this research allowed us to identify and justify the most adequate translation out of the available three variants in Russian. Our analysis showed that only the third translator always strived to achieve communicative equivalence of the original and the translation, based on the very situation of communication.

3. Conclusion

As a result of analyzing the means of expressing the humor in *Sixteen Candles*. It seems possible to conclude that the main source of comic effect in it is humor in the speech of the characters. The characters in the movie banter ironically with each other, using youth slang, wordplay, and erased vulgarisms. The visual component of a movie often helps the translator to find the right verbal means in the target language. In addition, the comic effect is often created on the basis of a strong connection between verbal and non-verbal means of expression, such as the appearance of the characters, their facial expressions and gestures, the reactions of others to their behavior and remarks, etc.

Regrettably, translators sometimes overlook non-verbal methods of humor creation, leading to a superficial understanding. They might opt for literal translations of culturally or emotionally nuanced statements, resorting to unnecessary lexical substitutions or omissions. Sometimes this even leads to a distortion of the meaning of statements, not to mention the loss of comic effect.

Audiovisual translation is a rather young branch of modern translation studies. Comparative analyses of film translations are very rare (compared to translations of literary works). It is thought that this method can help translators develop objective criteria for evaluating the quality of film translations. Access to extensive references on the lives of native speakers, filmmaking processes, and the intentions of creators provides translators with ample opportunity to adequately prepare for translating audiovisual texts. This preparation enables them to convey the content, including its humorous elements, as accurately as possible.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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