

# Dimensions of Humor

## Explorations in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies and Translation

Carmen Valero-Garcés, ed.



PUV



Dimensions of Humor  
Explorations in Linguistics, Literature,  
Cultural Studies and Translation



---

Dimensions of Humor  
Explorations in Linguistics, Literature,  
Cultural Studies and Translation

CARMEN VALERO-GARCÉS, ED.

UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA  
2010

---

ENGLISH IN THE WORLD SERIES

GENERAL EDITOR

Antonia Sánchez Macarro  
*Universitat de València, Spain*

ADVISORY EDITORIAL BOARD

Professor Enrique Bernárdez  
*Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain*

Dr Anne Burns  
*Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia*

Professor Angela Downing  
*Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain*

Dr Martin Hewings  
*University of Birmingham, Great Britain*

Dr Ken Hyland  
*City University of Hong Kong, China*

Professor James Lantolf  
*Penn State University, Pennsylvania, USA*

Professor Michael McCarthy  
*University of Nottingham, Great Britain*

Professor M.Teresa Turell  
*Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain*

Professor Eija Ventola  
*University of Helsinki, Finland*

© The authors © 2010 by the Universitat de València

*Design and typeset: Celso Hdez. de la Figuera*

*Cover design by Pere Fuster (Borràs i Talens Assessors SL)*

*Cover composition by Rubén Rodrigo and Alba Rodrigo*

ISBN: 978-84-370-8290-5



## CONTENTS

Notes on contributors .....	9
Preface .....	19
Editor's introduction .....	21

### PART I

#### HUMOR AND LINGUISTICS

<b>1</b> Found in translation: crosstalk as a form of humour <i>Delia Chiaro</i> .....	29
<b>2</b> «A musical comedy without music»: P.G. Wodehouse's sense of humour <i>Vicente López Folgado</i> .....	55
<b>3</b> A cognitive approach to humor in political cartoons <i>Isabel Negro Alousque</i> .....	79
<b>4</b> Comic strips in the classroom linguistically and pragmatically considered. A first description of cases <i>Eduardo José Varela Bravo</i> .....	91
<b>5</b> Socio-political cartoons: a reflection of cultural values <i>Elizabeth Woodward Smith</i> .....	113

### PART II

#### HUMOR AND LITERATURE

<b>6</b> Intensification, reduction or preservation of irony? Günter Grass's <i>Im Krebsgang</i> and its translation into English <i>Diana Coromines i Calders</i> .....	143
<b>7</b> Visual rhythm, iconicity and typography: the ways to humour in E. E. Cummings' poetry <i>Teresa González Mínguez</i> .....	171
<b>8</b> How to tackle humour in literary narratives <i>Cristina Larkin Galiñanes</i> .....	199



- 9 Igor Delgado Senior's *Epopeya Malandra*: a study of parody and humor in literature  
*Diana Pifano* ..... 225

### PART III

#### HUMOR AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

- 10 Humor and Arabs  
*Raoudha Kammoun* ..... 245
- 11 Foolery as a means to personal safety: the comic apprehension of power relations in Emile Habibi's *The Pessoptimist*  
*Ibrahim A. El-Hussari* ..... 269
- 12 A humorous portrait of the English Culture: Julio Camba's *London*  
*Marta Nadales Ruiz* ..... 289
- 13 Pitfalls, impossibilities and small victories in translating Australian humour: a case study on Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* and *Dirt Music*  
*Jorge Salavert* ..... 311

### PART IV

#### HUMOR AND TRANSLATION

- 14 What's in a title? Transposing black comedy titles for Italian viewers  
*Chiara Bucaria* ..... 333
- 15 The audiovisual translation of fixed expressions and idiom-based puns  
*Margherita Dore* ..... 361
- 16 Shopping around: translating humour in audiovisual and multimedia advertising  
*Adrián Fuentes Luque* ..... 387
- 17 Translating humour in comics for children: a Donald Duck comic strip and its Italian translation  
*Margherita Ippolito* ..... 407
- 18 Roman satire and the General Theory of Verbal Humor  
*Heather Vincent* ..... 419
- 19 Humour in advertismment translation. With special reference to translation between Chinese and English  
*Cui Ying and Zhao Jing* ..... 453





## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**DON L. F. NILSEN**, with his wife, Alleen Pace Nilsen, is the founder of the International Society for Humor Studies. Don and Alleen are also the Past Co-Presidents of the American named society. Alleen and Don are the co-authors of the *Encyclopedia of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Humor* (Greenwood, 2000), *Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature* (Scarecrow, 2007), *Vocabulary Plus—High School and Up: A Source-Based Approach*, and *Vocabulary Plus—K-8: A Source-Based Approach* (Pearson, 2004). In 2000, the Encyclopedia won the *Choice* «Outstanding Academic Book» award, and in 2001, it won the American Library Association «Outstanding Reference Source» award. Don and Alleen's *Pronunciation Contrasts* is currently in the process of revision. The revision will include spelling as well as pronunciation; it will deal with the English spelling system as a «morphophonemic system.» With Greenwood Press, Don is also the author of *Humor in Twentieth-Century British Literature*, *Humor in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, *Humor in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Restoration*, *Humor Scholarship: A Research Bibliography*, and *Humor in Irish Literature*. Don is a Professor of English Linguistics at Arizona State University.

**CARMEN VALERO-GARCÉS** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Alcalá, Madrid (Spain), Director of the Post Graduate and Undergraduate Program on Public Service Interpreting and Translation since 2000. Being a linguist and a translator, her main interests in humour are connected with topics related to languages and cultures. Her first contact with humour research was a paper she presented in the International Society for Humor Studies Conference in 1996 dealing with the translation of underground comics into Spanish. Since then she's been studying comics from different perspectives. In 2003 she coordinated the I Conference on Humor across Cultures. Graphic designers, immigrants from different countries and researchers on cultural aspects and humor were invited to talk about how people from one country see «the



Other» from different countries in their jokes and cartoons. The result was *Interculturality, Translation, Humor, and Migration* (2003), which has been used as a complementary tool in schools and associations working with immigrants. In 2007 she was one of the coordinators of the annual conference of ISHS, and in 2008 she organised the II Conference on Humor at the University of Alcalá. She has also explored Russian and Romanian humour and contrast British and Spanish Humour. Some of these articles have been published in *Quevedos*, the annual journal of the Fundación General de la Universidad de Alcalá. As a teacher, she is also interested in promoting the use of humour in the classroom - which is not a very easy task as many of you will probably know; and she is a member of ISHS and of Humor-Aula. She is also the author of various articles on humor.

**DELIA CHIARO** is Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Bologna's Advanced School in Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators and Chair of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Translation, Languages and Culture. Since publishing *The Language of Jokes: Analysing Verbal Play* in 1992 (London, Routledge) she has combined her interest in verbally expressed humour (VEH) with her passion for cinema by examining what exactly occurs when VEH in English is transformed into dubbed or subtitled filmic products. As well as considering the transformations which cinematic dialogues undergo, she is a keen observer of audience perception to the changed VEH and applies methodologies taken from the Social Sciences to the field of Translation Studies to examine recipients' reactions. Her latest publications include *Humor in Interaction*, co-edited with Neal Norrick (John Benjamins) and a two volume compendium: *Humour, Translation and Literature* and *Humour, Translation and the Media* published by Continuum. As well as being the author of numerous publications, she has been invited to lecture across Europe, in Asia and New Zealand.

**VICENTE LÓPEZ FOLGADO** is a Senior Lecturer in Translation and Interpretation at the University of Córdoba, Spain, and former director of that Department. He has published several articles in philological and linguistic journals on discourse pragmatics and translation. His interest in inter-cultural humour started in his courses in Spanish for foreign students (UIMP, Santander Summer



Courses) and in English-Spanish translation (Cádiz, Ciudad Real, Cuenca, Valencia and Valladolid). His co-authored title *Translation in Action* (1999) makes of humour a necessary ingredient. In some of his papers, like «The pragmatics of utterance interpretation: the case of linguistic *puns*», he approached the inter-linguistic ambiguity as a source of humour. At present, he is supervising a thesis on the language of comic (*Ghost World*) and is engaged in a project on humour and politics.

**ISABEL NEGRO ALOUSQUE** has been an assistant teacher at the Complutense University in Madrid for twelve years. She is graduated in English and French Philology and has a PhD in English Philology. She has taken part in two research projects financed by the Complutense University. She has collaborated in writing two books on business English and has published several articles in journals of linguistics (*CIF, Miscelánea, Atlantis, Revista de Lingüística y Lenguas Aplicadas*). She has also presented many papers in different conferences organized by a number of linguistic associations (AEDEAN, AESLA, AELCO, CRAL, ACLES). Her research fields are cognitive semantics, cultural issues in translation and lexicology.

**EDUARDO JOSÉ VARELA BRAVO** is Senior lecturer in English Philology, at University of Vigo. Ph.D University of Seville 1987. Thesis: *José María Blanco White, periodista político. (Joseph Blanco White, political journalist*. Main publications on Blanco White and pragmatics. Research interest in pragmatics, language teaching, methodology and the new technologies applied to the classroom and the present curricular reform. His main project nowadays is focused on exploiting all the potentiality of strip creation for teaching and creative purposes. He composes his own strips using different free well-known sites on the web and publishes them in his teaching blog: *My English Journal*. His latest presentations and publications are centered on the language and pragmatics of the comic strips and related forms of expression (collage, clipart) and on their value as teaching and interactive tools in activities connected with language, grammar, pragmatics and communication.



**ELIZABETH WOODWARD SMITH** is Senior lecturer of English at the University of A Coruña. Areas of scholarly interest: History and culture of the British Isles; cultural references in English literature; translation of cultural concepts and humour. Participating at present in a research project dealing with the periodical press in eighteenth-century Britain. Articles in both Spanish and international journals; editor of three collections of essays on cultural diversity. (Some of the most recent publications are: *Diccionario de referencias culturales en la literatura inglesa*, 2002. *Aspects of Culture*, 2002. *About Culture*, 2004. *Approaching Cultures through English*, 2007).

**DIANA COROMINES I CALDERS** holds M.A. degrees in Audiovisual Communication (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2000) and in Translation Studies (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2007). Her main research field is the translation of irony in narrative prose fiction. She is currently working on her PhD, which focuses on how irony in Günter Grass's masterpieces has been rendered into Germanic and Romance languages (English, Danish, Catalan, French and Spanish), in terms of its intensity. The aim of the research project is to analyse the macrostructural impact of irony shifts in the different versions and to propose a classification of techniques of irony, which will hopefully shed light on some of the constraints affecting its translation: specifically, translator-specific, culture-specific, and language-specific constraints. Among her published works is her Master's thesis: *Les divergències d'intensitat en la traducció d'emocions i actituds: l'enuig i la ironia a les versions catalana i castellana de l'obra Unkenrufe*.

**M. TERESA GONZÁLEZ MÍNGUEZ** is an English teacher at IES Cervantes and an Associate Professor at Carlos III University in Madrid. She has worked extensively on E. E. Cummings, on whose writings she has published articles for *Spring: The Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society* and *B.A.B.E.L. – AFIAL*. She has delivered papers on Cummings and Charles Rennie Mackintosh in various international conferences. Her work on Canadian studies includes articles on Alice Munro, such as «British Tradition and the Quest for Canadian Identity in Alice Munro's Narratives» (2008). She has also reviewed a number of publications on T. S. Eliot, English theatre and contemporary American literature.



**CRISTINA LARKIN GALIÑANES** is Tenured Lecturer in English Language and Literature at the University of Vigo, Spain. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Santiago de Compostela with a thesis on «The British Humorous Novel in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Study in Genre», and has since published several articles and books on literary humour, including, among others, «A Few Facts about Funny Fiction or, Jokes and their Relation to the Humorous Novel» in *Poetics Today*, Vol 26, Nº 1 (Spring 2005) and *A Source Book of Literary and Philosophical Writings about Humour and Laughter: The Seventy-Five Essential Texts from Antiquity to Modern Times* (co-published with Jorge Figueroa Dorrego, 2009).

**DIANA PIFANO** attended the University of Ottawa, where she received her MA (2004) and PhD (2008). In the summer of 2008, she joined the faculty at the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Dalhousie University, where she teaches courses in Spanish language and culture, as well as Latin American Literature. Her research in the field of humour in Hispanic literature began with an exploration of the role of humor in *Los jefes*, a collection of short stories by Mario Vargas Llosa. Her doctoral dissertation explores the relationship between humour and literature in the short stories of Venezuelan author Igor Delgado Senior, setting forth a methodology for integrating the study of humour to the orthodox framework of literary analysis through the exploration of both the humorous elements within the narrative (jokes, puns, rhymes), as well as, the pragmatic aspects of the narrative as they serve the humorous intent of the story. Her most recent research project explores graphic humor, specifically, the editorial cartoons of Venezuelan humorist Rayma Supriani. This study contrasts the two main branches of the author's work—the political cartoons published daily in a national newspaper and the cartoons published weekly in women's magazine—in order to explore the formal aspects of each discourse, paying close attention to the intended readers of these texts and their required competence. The aim of this study is to describe how gender differences are articulated in these humorous discourses.



**RAOUDHA KAMMOUN** works at Université de La Manouba. Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Humanités, La Manouba. Raoudha Kammoun was born in 1962 in Sfax, Tunisia. She received her Ph.D from the Université de Paris VII in 1989 and currently teaches in the Department of English at the University of Manouba, Tunis. Her research interests include gender and language, bilingualism, multiculturalism and language planning, humor studies, translation, gender and humor. She is the author of several articles about bilingualism and humor, humor and Arabs, gender and language, gender and humor, among others. She is fluent in Arabic, French and English and uses primary sources from these languages.

**IBRAHIM A. EL-HUSSARI** is Professor of English and Cultural Studies at the School of Arts and Sciences, Department of Humanities, of the Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon. He earned his PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Leicester, United Kingdom, in 2002. His main field of interest and research is language education, comparative literature, and culture. He has participated in many International Conferences on a variety of topics, including Conflict-Resolution Strategies. He has been writing extensively on language and linguistics, culture, comparative literature, and on translation. So far, he has published six academic books on a variety of topics, seventeen story-books under Juvenile and Young Adults' Literature, and twelve articles in peer-reviewed international journals. His last two books (*The Quest for Meaning in William Faulkner's 'The Sound and the Fury': A Study in Narrative Discourse* and *Cultural Awareness Between Theory and Practice: A Case Study*) came out in 2008 and 2009 respectively. He is also a member of the Faculty Senate at LAU and Coordinator of Rhetoric and Creative Writing courses at the Department of Humanities there. His academic research papers and articles were published in England, the USA, Denmark, Greece, Czech Republic, Pakistan, Lebanon, Spain, and Ireland.

**MARTA NADALES RUIZ** is Associate Professor in the department of English Language and Linguistics at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where she teaches English for Documentation Science and Contrastive Syntax. Since 2003 she is a faculty member at *Universidades Reunidas Norteamericanas* (North American Universities) and she is also a professor at the Master in Bilingual and Multicultural Education at Universidad de Alcalá. Her doctoral



dissertation explored *The Construction of English Identity: Nineteenth century Spanish travellers*. She is an active member and coordinator of the research group «Bibliopegia» and has participated in international conferences and seminars on cultural studies, old book and travel writing.

**JORGE SALAVERT** studied Philology at the Universitat de València and collaborated with the Shakespeare Institute and the Shakespeare Foundation in the edition and translation of several of Shakespeare's plays into Spanish. He has been a Spanish-government accredited translator since 1992. He has lived in Australia since 1996, where he has had extensive experience as an accredited translator and as a teacher of Spanish. In 2000 he was Senior Spanish Translator for the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games. He completed a Graduate Diploma of Education and a Master of Arts in Translation Studies. He has held teaching positions at the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and at every tertiary institution in Canberra. He has been working at the Australian Academy of the Humanities since 2008. He is the author of a commented English translation of Quevedo's 'A un hombre de gran nariz' and of an essay on Australian poet Ania Walwicz, amongst other publications.

**CHIARA BUCARIA** graduated in translation from the Advanced School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators of the University of Bologna, Italy, from which she also received her PhD in translation and cultural studies. She also holds a Master's degree in English from Youngstown State University (USA) and in 2006 was the recipient of the International Society for Humor Studies' (ISHS) Graduate Student Award. Chiara Bucaria currently holds a post-doc research assistantship at the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Translation, Languages and Cultures (University of Bologna) investigating the impact of censorship and manipulation in translated TV programmes. Her main research interests include humour studies, audiovisual translation, child language brokering, and the relationship between censorship and translation.

**MARGHERITA DORE** after graduating with a First Class Honours Degree in English and Latin American Studies at the University of Sassari, Italy (2001), completed a MSc in Translation Studies at UMIST, UK (2002). She taught Italian in Spain for one year and



then moved to Lancaster University where she was the Italian lector at the Department of European Languages and Cultures (DELC) for four years (2003/4-2006/7). She simultaneously started a part-time doctoral research in the Audiovisual Translation of Humour at the Department of Linguistics and English Language (LAEL) at the same university (completed in October 2008). She is currently working as Visiting Scholar at the National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece and continues to research on translation and humour.

**ADRIÁN FUENTES LUQUE** is Senior Lecturer at the Universidad Pablo Olavide in Seville, Spain. He is also a professional translator, having served as Senior Translator at the Australian Embassy in Spain. His research areas include audiovisual translation, translation of humour (having carried out the first empirical study on the reception of audiovisual translated humour), and the translation of advertising and tourist texts. He is the editor of «La traducción en el sector turístico» (Atrio, 2005), the first monograph on translation in the tourist sector.

**MARGHERITA IPPOLITO** holds a PhD in Translation Studies from the University of Bari, Italy. She is part-time lecturer in English Language at the Faculty of Engineering, Polytechnic of Bari, and teaches English in a secondary school. Her main research interests are young readers' literature in translation, the translation of the verbal and the visual in children's literature, and the translation of humour. Her publications include articles on these topics. Among them: «The Relationship between Text and Illustrations: Translating Beatrix Potter's *Little Books* into Italian» in *Whose Story? Translating the Verbal and the Visual in Literature for Young Readers* edited by Riitta Oittinen and Maria González Davies (2008) and «Tradurre l'oralità nei libri per l'infanzia», in *Literary Translation and Beyond/Traduzione letteraria e oltre. La traduzione come negoziazione dell'alterità* edited by Rosella Mallardi (2008).

**HEATHER VINCENT**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Classics, Eckerd College, Saint Petersburg, Florida (USA). Areas of research: Roman Satire, Greek and Roman Comedy, Ancient Theories of Humor and Laughter, Interdisciplinary Approaches to Comedic Literature. Education: Ph.D., Brown University (2004); M. A., University of Maryland (1996); B. S., Vanderbilt University (1989). Teaching





experience includes: Latin and Ancient Greek languages and literatures, Greek and Roman history, various lecture courses on the ancient world (women & gender, classical mythology, icon & ideology in the Augustan Age, ancient ethnography, and Greek tragedy in contemporary film & literature). Current research projects and forthcoming works include: a book chapter on language and humor in Terence; a monograph on linguistic approaches to Juvenal's *Satires*, and an article on humor and the grotesque in Juvenal 15.

**CUI YING** is a PhD student from the Department of Chinese, Translation & Linguistics, City University of Hong Kong. She got her Bachelor's Degree at Shandong University at Weihai, P. R. China, majoring in English language and literature. Upon graduation she started further studies, and she got her Master's Degree in the same university, specializing in translation studies. Right now she is studying for her PhD at City University of Hong Kong, still doing translation studies. Her major research interest lies in the translation of advertising discourse, in particular the flexibility and creativity in translating advertisements, as well as the possible cultural implications behind this phenomenon.





## PREFACE

### ENGLISH AS A CONTACT LANGUAGE.

### HUMOR AS A NECESSARY FEATURE OF TRANSLATION

An old riddle defines a *polyglot* as someone who speaks many languages, a *bilingual* person as someone who speaks two languages, and a *monolingual* as an American. The extent to which native speakers of English, especially Americans, deserve the reputation of not learning other languages relates to the fact that historically English speakers have been physically separated from having intimate contact with speakers of other languages. This separation was first caused by something as small as the English Channel, but later by oceans, deserts, and mountain ranges.

That today this anthology (*Dimensions of Humour: Explorations in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies and Translation*) is being written in English shows how physical barriers are no longer an impediment to communication. Today English is spoken, either as a native or a learned language by about half of the people in the world –some two billion speakers. The model that speakers used to aspire to was either Received Standard British or Broadcast American, but now we have Australian English and Indian English, along with such interlanguages as Spanglish, Deutschlish, Franglish («la Langue du Coca Cola»), Japlish, Chinglish, and Russlish.

While English speakers may not have been very good about learning other languages, we have always borrowed the «best» metaphors from other speakers. The English word *walrus*, comes from Germanic *whale horse*, while *porpoise*, and *puny* come from the French *porc poisson* (pig fish), and *puis né* (later born) respectively. My grandchildren love the humour shown in such Italian food metaphors as *linguini* meaning «tongues»; *vermicelli* meaning «worms», and *tortellini* meaning «turtles». They also appreciate knowing that Dutch *poppycock* means «soft dung», Yiddish *schmaltz* means «chicken fat», and *schnoz* means «nose».



In Spanglish, *shopping*, *chilling*, *hanging out* and *muggers* have become *chopping*, *chileando*, *jangear*, and *joldoperos* («holdup specialists»). This humour is intentional, but unintentional humour is also inevitable, as when in the 1960s, U. S. President John F. Kennedy was visiting Germany and said «Ich bin ein Berliner» («I am a jelly donut») when he meant to say «Ich bin Berliner» («I am a Berliner»). If he had been in a different German city he could have appropriately said, «Ich bin Hamburger», «Ich bin Frankfurter», or even «Ich bin Wiener».

Some thirty years ago, I began studying humour in my linguistics classes, not just because it was fun, but because I had observed that humour is one of the last areas to be mastered when students learn a new language. And since humour always has to involve some kind of a surprise –something different and unexpected– I’ve come to appreciate the challenge of understanding and explaining the linguistic underpinnings of what makes readers and listeners smile.

This is why I am so happy to see twenty talented scholars putting forth their best efforts to work with the wide range of humour subjects represented in these essays, which I am eager to share with my own students. I am hoping they will help my students understand why I so often encourage them to «Be bold!». Rather than being afraid to speak, I want students to enjoy experimenting with language. I tell them that when they make mistakes, they can always use humour to recover. It is a valuable social bonding mechanism and an effective tool in learning both languages and cultures. It is wonderful to have a book which so clearly makes these points.

DON L. F. NILSEN  
*Arizona State University*



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### DIMENSIONS OF HUMOR.

#### AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLORE HUMOR IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

The book *Dimensions of Humor. Explorations in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies, and Translation* aims to be a different type of contribution to the growing number of articles that are published in the academic literature on the topic of humor. There are two main reasons behind the publication of this volume. The first of these is to continue the journey along the path towards full recognition of humor as a discipline worthy of academic-level research and assessment. The other reason is to offer a new and integrating perspective of humor, to showcase the wide range of dimensions that humor offers by applying the current trends and theories used in such established areas as literature, Applied Linguistics, Translation Studies, Gender Studies, and Cultural Studies.

In reference to our first objective, the conviction held in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s that humor was not serious enough to be studied by prestigious researchers has since been shattered. Only a few papers dedicated specifically to the subject of humor could be found at congresses or in literary or linguistic publications past. Thanks to the work of authors like Attardo, Raskin, Davies, Nilsen, Martin, Ruch, Chiaro or Zanettin, or associations such as the *International Society for Humor Studies* (ISHS) or the *Hispanic Society for Humor Studies*, whose annual conferences are becoming more and more renowned, or the appearance of journals (*Humor*) and special editions (*Translating Humor* 2002; *Humor in Interaction* 2009), the void is being filled. Gaps, however, still remain that need to be addressed, hence the second objective of this paper.

I agree with the authors cited above and with some of the authors that appear in this volume when they say that, traditionally, Literary Criticism and applied conferences have accepted the presence of humor in order to study it as something secondary. Even when humor was awarded «first class» status, it was studied through the



application of subjective criteria or appreciations that lacked theoretical foundation or that were based on momentary impressions. Who has not read or seen articles about the irony or the paradoxes of such-and-such an author? Or about an author's use of language and the resources used which give that author a humorous tone? Or about the humor in such-and-such a novel? The present volume does contain a few articles along these lines; however, as Larkin points out so well, Literary Criticism of humorous texts can be more complicated and offer much more. The same is true of linguistics, which I hope to be able to demonstrate in the following pages, and which is manifested in the contributions that made this book possible.

As for other disciplines such as Translation Studies, the significant increase in the number of papers whose central theme is humor gives us the confidence to say that the idea that humor has trouble crossing over languages and cultures is no longer believed. For years, the absence of academic literature on humor and translation has been felt. In the mid 1990s, a certain awakening started to develop with the reading of doctoral theses, conferences, or the publication of special issues dedicated exclusively to humor by important publishing houses like John Benjamins, Mouton de Gruyter, or St. Jerome under titles that revealed the highly interdisciplinary nature of Humor Studies (HS). Translation Studies and Gender Studies also began this way, sharing with Humor Studies the same moment of initiation in their trajectory as independent areas of study.

Just a look at a few recent titles will be enough to check the variety of disciplinary approaches, genres and types, and a growing interest in projects to test humor appreciation and behaviour.

Following the *Encyclopedia of 20th-Century American Humor* by Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don L. F. Nilsen –nominated Outstanding Academic Book in 2000– publications related to humor could be categorised into the following genres and types: Art and Cartooning, Gallows Humor, Humorous Names, Jokes, Lawyer Humor, Paradox, Parody, Play and Games, Poetry, Political Humor, Puns and Riddles, and Satire.

If we talk about disciplinary approaches, the following are included: Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, Foreign Language, Gender Studies, Linguistics, Psychology, Religion, Music and Dance, Science, Sociology, Theatre, Theory.

Under the heading of Cultural Studies a big selection of studies on specific traditions are available: African Humor, African-American Humor, Australian Humor, British Humor, Canadian Humor, French



Humor, German Humor, Irish Humor, Italian Humor, Latin American Humor, Jewish Humor, Native American Humor, Polish Humor, Russian Humor, Scandinavian Humor, or Spanish Humor. Examples of some of them can be found in this volume.

The applications of humor offer us another possibility to classify Humor Studies and another opportunity to reaffirm its multidisciplinary. Under the heading of «Applications», Nilsen and Nilsen include: Creativity, Coping with Stress, Disability and Special Needs, Adult Education, Child Education, Humor and Aging, Humorous Errors, Laughter, Medicine, Rhetoric, Testing and Evaluation, or Therapy.

It is also significant the interest for developing humor tests. Over the past century, social and behavioural scientists have constructed questionnaires, surveys, tests, and other *measures* to assess humor appreciation and creation as well as humor-related behaviour. Historically, these tests have varied in quality, but in recent years they have become more rigorous in their development and application. The institutional website of the *International Society for Humor Studies* offers a catalogue of humor appreciation tests, and by entering each test, information on authorship and test design along with references to key articles involving the measure are included. A few examples as taken from the ISHS website are:

Example 1:

3 WD Humor Test

Authorship: Willibald Ruch

Category: Humor Appreciation Test

Year: 1983

Measures: Six scales for the funniness and aversiveness of 3 types of humor based on structure (*Incongruity-Resolution* and *Nonsense*) and one type of humor based on content (*Sexual Humor*).

Example 2:

Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ)

*Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ)*

Authorship: Rod A. Martin & Herbert M. Lefcourt

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1984

Measures: Overall score for the tendency to be amused and laugh easily across situations.



Example 3:

State-Trait-Cheerfulness-Inventory-Trait Part (STCI-T)

Authorship: Ruch, Köhler, & van Thriel

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1996

Measures: Trait cheerfulness, trait seriousness, trait bad mood

Example 4:

Sense of Humor Questionnaire 6 (SHQ-6)

Authorship: Sven Svebak

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1996

Measures: Single sense of humor score

Example 5:

Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS)

Authorship: James A. Thorson and Falvey C. Powell

Category: Self-Report Scale

Year: 1993

Measures: Four scales for Overall Humor Sense, Humor Appreciation, Creativity, and Coping

Example 6:

IPAT Humor Test

Authorship: Donald L. Tollefson and Raymond B. Cattell

Category: Humor Appreciation Test

Year: 1963/1966

Measures: Thirteen humor-related personality traits

In order to finish this introductory section, a sample of some significant titles more clearly related to the topic of this volume are mentioned. These are books published from the mid 1990's onwards, and they have highly contributed to the recognition of Humor Studies as a category on its own right.

*Linguistic Theories of Humor* by Salvatore Attardo (1994), *The Basic Humor Process* by Robert L. Latta (1999), *Techniques of Satire* by Emil A. Drahtser (1994), *Humorous Texts* by Salvatore Attardo (2001), *The Sense of Humor* Willibald Ruch (1998, 2007), *Good Humor, Bad Taste* by





Giselinde Kuipers (2006), *Jokes and their Relation to Society* by Christie Davies (1998), *Humor Theory* by Igor Krichtafovitch (2008)), *The Psychology of Humor* by Rod A. Martin (2006), *Translating Humor* by Jerome Vandale (2002), *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin (2008), or *Humor in Interaction* by Norris and Chiaro (2009).

All these publications were preceded by the seminal work by Victor Raskin *The Semantic Mechanism of Humor* (1985), and by «Script theory revis(it)ed: Joke similarly ad joke representational model», an also seminal article published in *Humor, International Journal of Humor Research* in 1991 by Attardo and Raskin. A large number of studies that have appeared since then have somehow adopted the broad linguistic framework they presented as the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH).

This volume wants to be another significant contribution to the every day more extensive literature on humor and a proof of the ever growing interest in humor by academics and researchers coming from different disciplines. I hope this helps, first, to stop being considered as «a few scholars who are either courageous enough (or possibly foolhardy enough) to address such a problematical, yet at the same time fascinating area of research», as Delia Chiaro (2009: 475) writes; and secondly to fulfil the main goal of HS as stated by Brône et al (2006: 224): «the goal is to take subjectivity out of the loop and somehow capture that aspect of a humorous meaning that humans themselves cannot always quantify without recourse to ‘it’s funny because it makes me laugh’».

The book is a miscellany of studies and reflects an assortment of diverse forms of humor, trying to go further from personal *ad hoc* reflections and offering a more scientifically oriented approach. The authors represent an international array of scholars from various theoretical perspectives, more specifically concerned with linguistics, literary, translation, cultural and gender aspects of humor. The contributors and topics were chosen to represent current research in the interdisciplinary area of humor studies in the above mentioned areas. The authors are all scholars with interests in both humor studies and adjacent disciplines such as Linguistic Pragmatics, Translation Studies, Discourse Analysis, or Gender Analysis. They analyse data of various sorts, ranging from everyday conversation to talk at work to control experiments to questionnaires, and they employ a variety of approaches, from Conversation Analysis and Cognitive Linguistics, to Literary Criticism, Second Language Acquisition or Sociolinguistics, to name but a few.



As the title indicates the book is divided into four parts: 1 Humor and Linguistics; 2 Humor and Literature; 3 Humor and Cultural Aspects; and 4 Humor and Translation. In each section the articles appear in alphabetical order. However, this classification does not intend to be rigorous and it can be considered one of the many possible ones as overlapping is inevitable between the areas we are trying to cover: Applied Linguistics, Literature, Translation Studies, and Cultural Studies. Many papers use translation within literary, linguistic, or cultural studies as just another element, others make it the central theme of their article. Other times, a literary work or a cultural subject serves as the base on which such-and-such a theory is applied, or a (sub)genre of humor is chosen, such as the use of comics in teaching a second language. Humor, thus, offers many dimensions: it is, if you will, a polyhedral structure with many faces and diverse points of contact which give it coherence and its interdisciplinary character. As for the spelling, we have tried to be respectful with the authors of the articles. The contents of this volume are briefly summarised in the following pages.

In part I –Humor and Linguistics– four articles are included:

Delia Chiaro in «Found in translation: crosstalk as a form of humor», in contrast to traditional comparative studies on humor and translation, examines devices which make use of different languages in contact and in contrast as well as translation itself as a source of humor in examples taken from cinema.

Vicente López Folgado, under the title of ««A musical comedy without music»: P.G. Wodehouse's sense of humor», offers a classical study of humor in literature by concentrating on Wodehouse, the acclaimed storywriter of *The Saturday Evening Post before the World War II*, under the theoretical framework of Cognitive Pragmatics. López discerned three recurrent resources for humor: the overstatement, the understatement and the style shift throughout the series of three stories on Jeeves as a co-leading character. Attention is mostly paid to the role of implicatures with regard to the explicit meaning of sentences, which, needless to say, requires the explanation of contextual assumptions as made both by interacting characters and by the readers.

Isabel Negro, as the title indicates –«A cognitive approach to humor in political cartoons»– offers a cognitive approach to French humor in political cartoons following Raskin's incongruity theories of humor together with the cognitive Blending Theory by Fauconnier and Turner.



Eduardo José Varela's article «Comic strips in the classroom linguistically and pragmatically considered. A first description of cases» offers another specific dimension of humor research: humor in Second Language Acquisition. He explores his concerns as a teacher and analyses the production, processing and interpretation of comic strips as examples in the classroom to account for difficult structures in terms of lexical, syntactic, semantic, register, variant, pragmatic and communicative deviance. Varela considers that the exam of these deviant examples in class together with the exploitation of deviance as a technique to create comic strips can be a useful pedagogical tool to study many communicative, social and cultural aspects that are not usually present in the standard textbooks.

Elizabeth Woodward, in «Socio-political Cartoons: a reflection of cultural values», examines the underlying cultural references in a sample of pocket cartoons published in the British press from 2007 to 2009. She studies the importance of the assumed shared knowledge and experiences for comprehension, and discusses how a seemingly simple format such as the pocket cartoon can reflect the specific cultural values which define a community.

In section 2 –Humor and Literature– the four articles included are the following:

Diana Coromines, in «Intensification, reduction or preservation of irony? Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* and its translation into English», explores translation topics in literature. She analyses the translation of irony as conceived in terms of intensification, reduction or preservation vis-à-vis with the original text by concentrating in Günter Grass's novel *Im Krebsgang* (2002) and its translation into English, as the title indicates.

Teresa González, in «Visual rhythm, iconicity and typography: the ways to humor in E. E. Cummings' poetry» demonstrates how Cummings makes humor and laughter compatible with poetry by studying this poet's particular use of linguistic devices, combined with his use of satire and irony, to act as vehicles of cultural transmission under his own optimistic vision of social changes.

Cristina Larkin, in «How to tackle humor in literary narratives», provides a systematic framework for the criticism of humorous narrative texts by studying, first, the nature of the narrative conventions and techniques used in humorous texts; secondly by analysing how these techniques function to make us laugh or at least smile; and, finally, by questioning the importance of the context,



both literary and extra literary, in leading us to a humorous interpretation of them.

Diana Pifano explores humor in Igor Delgado Senior's short story *Epopeya malandra*, a parody that transposes the historical events of Columbus' initial voyage to the context of a modern Latin American criminal subculture. She explores both the humorous elements within the narrative and the pragmatic aspects of the narrative that allows for a reflection of its social and critical values.

In section 3 - Humor and Cultural Aspects – the articles included are the following:

Raoudha Kammoun, in «Humor and Arabs», presents the results of her research on the importance of jokes in Arab daily life. A questionnaire was submitted to a sample of Tunisians to know their opinion on the Arab sense of humor, humor and gender and on the most widespread and appreciated type of humor. Kammoun also calls the attention to the ways in which Arab humor can contribute to widen the gap between the Arab Islamic world and the Western society.

Ibrahim El-Hussari, in «Foolery as a means to personal safety: the comic apprehension of power relations in Emile Habibi's *The Pessoptimist*», bases his study in the analysis of asymmetric power relations in the highly acclaimed novel *The Pessoptimist* through the study of the main character in a scene of political satire to show the dynamics of power relations between the indigenous community as the underprivileged minority and the immigrant Jewish settlers as the privileged majority in the so-called democratic State of Israel.

Marta Nadales, in «A humorous portrait of the English culture: Julio Camba's London», concentrates in cultural aspects and analyses the unusual humorous portrait of the English culture as seen by the Spanish journalist Julio Camba in *Londres. Impresiones de un español* (1916), a book full of irony and comic comparisons.

Jorge Salavert, in «Pitfalls, impossibilities and small victories in translating Australian humor: A case study on Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* and *Dirt Music*», assuming that Australian humor has some distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other English-language cultural settings, argues that, for a reliable translation of Australian humor to occur, the translator needs to be deeply familiar with Australian society and language. He uses examples from two novels by the Australian novelist Tim Winton and its Spanish translations.

In the last part –Humor and Translation– the articles included are the following:



Chiara Bucaria, in «What's in a title? Transposing black comedy titles for Italian viewers», shows the connection between Humor Studies and Translation Studies by exploring the transposition from English into Italian of film titles from a specific comedy subgenre –dark comedy– to show that in the corpus analysed the common elements found in this type of comedy are paradoxically maintained, and tend to disambiguate the references to death, murder, crimes of various kinds, but this is done in such a caricature-like tone that translations produce a different effect in the readers by foregrounding the comic elements rather than the Margherita Dore, under the title «The audiovisual translation of fixed expressions and idiom-based puns», concentrates on the analyses of the canonical forms of puns and their transfer across language and culture in examples taken from the first series of the TV comedy programme *Friends* and its Italian dubbed version combining the studies by Moon, Veisbergs, Raskin and Attardo at the lexical and cultural level.

Adrian Fuentes' research in «Shopping around: translating humor in audiovisual and multimedia advertising», concentrates on the translation of humor in audiovisual and multimedia advertising by analysing some of the main humor devices used to trigger a cognitive or an affective reaction in the viewer, with a persuasive function in mind. She also pays attention to the cultural and semiotic dimension of humor taking into account the limits and constraints of the different audiovisual formats (television, internet) and modes of translation.

Margherita Ippolito, with «Translating humor in comics for children: a Donald Duck comic strip and its Italian translation», explores the phenomenon of the translation of humor in children's comics by analysing the difficulties implied in the process of translating and the strategies used to put into Italian the *Donald Duck* comic strip.

Heather Vincent, in «Roman satire and the General Theory of Verbal Humor» first examines the applicability of Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor to Latin verse satire and its implications for translation; secondly, she discusses some difficulties posed at various levels of the hierarchy when script-switching (discretely triggered) coincides with multiple diffuse disjunctors such as register shifts; finally she outlines a strategy for the translation of Juvenal's satire.

Cui Ying and Zhao Jing are the authors of «Humor in advertisement translation» which focuses more on the relationships between Cultural Studies and Humor. They analyse some linguistic and cultural



differences in the language of advertising through the translation of word play from English into Chinese.

Summarising, the authors of the different articles all work independently across languages and cultures but all if them include humor as an essential element in their research which explains the title *–Dimensions of Humor*. This fact makes this volume an essential book to read by anyone interested in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies and/or Translation, and it also makes a valuable contribution to Humor Studies.

CARMEN VALERO-GARCÉS  
*University of Alcalá, Madrid*

## REFERENCES

- Brone, G., K. Feyaerts, K. and T. Veale (2006). «Introduction: Cognitive Linguistic Approaches to Humor», *Humor* 19.3, 203-228.
- Chiaro, D. (2009). Book review: Jeroen Vandaele: *Translating Humor. Special issue of The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication*. *Humor* 22.3, 475-481.

PART I

HUMOR AND LINGUISTICS





## **Found in translation: cross-talk as a form of humour**

DELIA CHIARO

*University of Bologna, Forlì, Italy*

### *Abstract*

It is common knowledge that verbal humour travels badly. As it travels across geographic and cultural boundaries and language inevitably gets in the way, translation becomes arduous, if not impossible. Although for many years there had been a marked absence of scholarly literature on humour and translation, since the mid-nineties there has been a noticeable revival on the subject with numerous postgraduate dissertations, presentations at conferences, not to mention dedicated special issues of renowned journals both in Translation Studies and in Humour Studies.

However, by and large, most studies on humour and translation tend to be contrastive in nature and concerned with examining strategies, problems and solutions to the difficult task of translating both spoken and written humour. Yet humour can also be generated through knowingly created instances of interlingual confusion or else through deliberately inept attempts at either using a foreign language or translation itself. In contrast to traditional comparative studies on humour and translation, drawing on examples from cinema, the present essay sets out to examine devices which make use of different languages in contact and in contrast as well as translation itself as a source of humour.

### *Keywords*

Audiovisual translation, cross-talk, humour studies, mock-language, multilingual films, pseudo-language, screen translation, verbally expressed humour.



## 1

*Introduction*

It is a well known fact that humour travels badly. This is especially the case with regards to verbal humour which, as it travels across geographic and cultural boundaries, is inevitably obstructed on its journey by different languages that render translation arduous, if not impossible. However, if prior to the mid-nineties there had been a marked absence of scholarly literature on humour and translation, more recently there has been a noticeable growth of interest in the subject with numerous postgraduate dissertations, presentations at conferences, as well as dedicated special issues of renowned journals both in Translation Studies and in Humour Studies (see Delabastita 1996, 1997; Vandaele 2002; Chiaro 2005).

By and large, as well as being concerned with the theoretical issues regarding equivalence and the (un)translatability of humour, most studies to date tend to be contrastive in nature and preoccupied with examining and/or discussing strategies, problems and solutions to the difficult task of translating instances of both spoken and written humour (see Chiaro 1992: 76-99; Chiaro 2008; Henry 2003; Vandaele 2001).

Rather than investigating the mechanisms of the *interlingual* translation of verbal humour, the present study sets out to examine the use of *interlingual humour*, namely two or more languages in contrast and *translation itself* as a source of humour. Cronin (2008) draws attention to numerous films in which translators and interpreters and the act of translation itself play a crucial role and discusses the ideologies these choices implicitly conceal. Taking comic films involving two or more languages as a starting point, I will firstly explore the concept of 'verbal foreignness' used for humorous means, secondly at various ways in which 'cross-talk' is implemented as a source of humour, thirdly, I will look at the concept of pseudo and mock language/s; and lastly, at how translation itself is used for humorous means.

## 2

*Otherness on screen*

Generally speaking, the concept of foreignness depicted in multilingual films, namely films containing dialogues in more than one



language, tends to be anything but funny. Classic examples of such films are Jean Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (France, 1963) which contains four languages; Michael Haneke's *Code Inconnu* (2000, France/Germany/Romania), seven; Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* (2004, USA), three. In such art house films, the use of multilingualism creates a sense of alienation and rupture. In Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006, USA/Mexico/Japan), which contains seven languages including Japanese sign language, characters' sense of isolation is exasperated through the inability to be understood by others. Richard Jones' (Brad Pitt) frustrating attempts at obtaining medical help when his wife (Cate Blanchett) is critically wounded in Morocco and the silence surrounding unruly, deaf-mute adolescent Chieko Wataya (Rinko Kikuchi) typify apartness and estrangement caused by the incapacity of being able to express themselves in the language of those around them.

In a rather different way, the use of more languages in one film was also common in the great Hollywood tradition. Suffice it to think of westerns in which the Native Americans were the 'bad guys' and inevitably spoke in their autochthonous language, the language of the peripheral group, while the 'good guys', the cowboys, spoke English. Again, in the tradition of World War II films, the bad guys would speak German or Japanese. It was not always clear what the baddies were saying, but whatever it was, it was certainly not good (see example from *La Vita è Bella*, Section 3.2.). Yet, the same tradition required audiences to suspend disbelief when characters belonging to the peripheral group, the «others», sooner or later in the same movie, learnt to speak (accented) English. With regard to Hollywood 'villain' Peter Lorre, Heiss refers to his «typecast way of speaking» (2004: 209) which was not unlike the stereotyping of other German, Japanese and Native American Hollywood bad guys. Again, in classic Disney productions, it is not unusual to find that the evil characters use British rather than US English. The cruel tiger Shere Kahn, the Liverpudlian vultures in *The Jungle Book* (1967, USA) and Scar in *The Lion King* (1994, USA) are just a few negative characters that Walt Disney productions underscored through the choice of a certain language variety. The ideological undertones of such choices are beyond the scope of this essay but are discussed at length by Cronin (2008). Cronin's work, however, also takes comedy into account exemplifying how the presentation of more languages in films by the Marx Brothers helped strengthen the identity of immigrants



in the New World and how Charlie Chaplin's satirical stance on both Hitler and Mussolini in *The Great Dictator* (1940, USA) candidly criticised the fascist regimes of the time. These films play heavily on the concept of foreignness, linguistic typecasting and even make use of pseudo-language, such as the German in Adenoid Hynkel's famous speech (see Section 4.1.). Pseudo-language apart, comedies containing more languages typically resort to instances of cross-talk, i.e., misunderstandings that occur due to an imperfect use and/or understanding of a foreign language. Furthermore, translation itself is also adopted as a source of humour as in the use of translationese in *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (Larry Charles, 2006, USA/UK) which clearly emerges from the standard format phrases of the DVD itself to the ungrammatical and unidiomatic English of the main character, Borat (see Cronin, 2008: 72-80).

As multimedial artifacts, films are polysemiotic in nature. They consist of more semiotic systems working together to create a single message. Thus, visual signs combine with acoustic signs and in turn both visuals and acoustics will be either verbal or non verbal in nature (see Chiaro 2009, 141-142). This study is restricted to verbal humour alone but for a discussion of visual elements that denote foreignness in film see Chiaro (2007).

**2.1 THE SOUND OF OTHERS** The first level of linguistic otherness in big (and small) screen comedy is surely represented by 'foreign' pronunciation. The accent of any language can be exaggerated so as to make it sound incongruous and out of place. Many examples of this come to mind, such as Peter Sellers both in the part of Indian physician Ahmed el Kabir in *The Millionairess* (Anthony Asquith, UK, 1960) famous for the duet «Goodness gracious me» with co-star Sofia Loren, and again as an Indian in *The Party* (Blake Edwards, USA, 1968), in which he has a pseudo-Punjabi conversation with a macaw. The phrase *goodness gracious me* is a commonplace that denotes an Indian speaker and is comparable to the clichéd use of *Mamma mia* in Italian. Notably, after the success of *The Millionairess* Seller's and Loren went on to record a single, *Bangers and Mash* (Parlophone records, UK, 1961) in which Sellers sings in Cockney and Loren in broken English. In the pre-PC sixties it was quite acceptable for Sellers to sing «I met her down in Napoli and didn't she look



great?» with chat-up line «Bon-gorno, sig-noreena there. Here, are you married?» after which he brings her back to «Blighty» to be fed with macaroni, minestrone and vermicelli. So unhappy does Sellers become with Italian cuisine that he pleads Loren to «give us a bash at the bangers and mash me mother used to make». Throughout the song, the stereotypical Italian accent in which every word ends in a schwa is reinforced by Sellers rather than Loren when the two switch roles and she beseeches him to give her the typically British meal «me mother used to make» in an Italo-cockney accent while he now exhorts her to «eat-a your tagliatelle, Soph». However, most famously, Sellers played Inspector Clouseau in the *Pink Panther* movies (Blake Edwards, USA, 1963-1978) in which the French accent is exaggerated to extremes. Steve Martin, who plays the part of Clouseau in the remakes of the film (Shawn Levy, USA/France, 2006 and Harald Zwart, USA, 2009) follows suit, especially in a lengthy scene in which Clouseau hires a dialogue coach so as to lose his French accent yet is quite unable to pronounce «I would like to buy a hamburger» correctly. Markedly, in the examples examined, food rears its head in issues of identity. While pasta has indeed become a global truism to categorize Italianness, there is some underlying irony in Frenchman Clouseau attempting to pronounce the word denoting an emblem of North American food culture, the hamburger.

**2.2 THE NAMES OF OTHERS** Proper names appear to be exploited frequently for humorous ends. Gus Portokalos father of the future bride in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Joel Zwick, 2002, USA) creates a joke within the film by repeatedly explaining to people he meets that his surname means ‘orange’ in Greek. Furthermore, when Gus introduces his twenty-seven nephews and nieces to the parents of his daughter’s fiancé, we learn that they all have the same name, «Nick, Nick, Nick, Nick, Nick, Nick, Nick, Nicky and...». Needless to say, audiences laugh at the stereotype.

Moreover, the way in which foreign names are pronounced also appears to be a cinematic ‘topos’. Two people of different ethnicities meet, one is unable to pronounce the name of the other correctly and humour ensues (see Dialogues 1-3). However, there is a flip side to the humour because the person whose name is being mispronounced insists on its being pronounced correctly and finds nothing funny in its incorrect pronunciation. A person’s name is a fundamental part



of his or her identity and it is essential that it should be pronounced appropriately.

Dialogue 1

(*Spanglish*, James L. Brooks, USA, 2004)

Deborah Clasky: What's your name? *Llamo*. It's one of my five Spanish words.

Flor: Flor Moreno.

Deborah Clasky: Floor?

Flor: Flor.

Deborah Clasky: Floor?

Flor: No, Flor.

Deborah Clasky: Floor.

Flor: Flor.

Bernie: It means 'flower', right?

Flor: Flower, yes.

Deborah Clasky: Floor! What I walk on, right?

Flor: Flor.

Deborah Clasky: Flor.

Flor: Flor!

Deborah Clasky: Is there some school of the ear I'm flunking out of right now?

*Flor speaks Spanish.*

Deborah Clasky: What'd she say?

Flor's sister: She says if you curl your tongue, then let it be loose, you'll get it... and that it's really hard for Americans...and that it's great you try so hard. Because most people wouldn't bother.

Deborah Clasky: Flor.

Flor: *Perfetto!*

Dialogue 2

(*French Kiss*, Lawrence Kasdan, USA/France, 1995)

Kate: It's Luke, isn't it?

Luc: Luc.

Kate: Luke.

Luc: No, not Luke. Luc.

Kate: Luke.



### Dialogue 3

(*Everything is Illuminated*, Liev Schreiber, USA, 2005)

Alex: Are you Jonfen?

Jonathan: What?

Alex: Jonfen. Are you Jonfen?

Jonathan: It's Jonathan.

Alex: What?

Jonathan: My name. It's Jonathan.

Alex: Jonfen.

Jonathan: Are you my translator?

Alex: Yes, I'm Alexander Perchov. I'll be your humble translator. I implore you to forgive my speaking of English, Jonfen... as I'm not so premium with it.

Jonathan: My name is Jonathan.

Firstly, in all three sequences the English speaker is aware of his or her supposed linguistic supremacy. Not only do Deborah and Kate who are supposed to be pronouncing the name of the «other» (in the examples a Spaniard and a Frenchman), but also Jonathan whose name is being mispronounced by a Ukrainian, display linguistic superiority. In Dialogue 1 Deborah begins by code switching into mock language (for a definition of *mock language* see Sherzer, Section 4.2.) and tries to be funny by claiming that «*Llamo* [is] one of my five Spanish words», almost as though there is something inherently clever about not being able to speak Spanish. The dialogue that follows consists of Flor's insistence that Deborah pronounces her name perfectly and not like its English quasi-homophone *floor*. A comic scene pursues in which we laugh at Deborah's attempts at rolling her tongue to produce the correct pronunciation of her housekeeper's name. However, Deborah's linguistic pre-eminence (and that of the English language?) is squashed by Flor's insistence that leads to a successful result, when Deborah finally manages to utter the name Flor as it should be.

In Dialogue 2 Kate is not only unable to pronounce the French 'u' sound (/y/) which has no equivalent in English but insists on pronouncing the name as she hears it without apparently making any effort to improve it. Totally unaware that her incorrect pronunciation might offend her travelling companion, Kate underscores her Anglo-centric superiority further by verbalizing her impression that Luc is



a «nicotine-saturated and hygiene-deficient Frenchman». Canadian Kate does not really care whether she pronounces the name Luc correctly or not. Thus the humour lies not so much in Kate's poor pronunciation skills, but more in the stereotypical stance she adopts towards the French in general.

Unlike the previous examples, Alex, in Dialogue 3, the person getting to grips with the name of the 'other' is Ukrainian and thus not a speaker of the dominant language, i.e. English. Although like Deborah and Kate he is unable to pronounce the name in question, Jonathan, who does not hear the foreign name correctly simply because his own language does not possess the same sounds, unlike them, is in a linguistic position of inferiority. Like Deborah he attempts to come as close as he can to the name with the sounds within his phonological repertoire. Jonathan is irritated by Alex's improper pronunciation of his name, and insult is added to injury in the way Alex has spelt Jonathan on his name card: Jonfen, spelling which, however, adds to audiences' positive humour response.

Finally, in *Blame it on the Bellboy* (Mark Hermann, 1991, UK), the entire plot revolves a mistake in pronunciation made by a bellboy in a hotel in Venice. The bellboy mistakes the pronunciation of three clients –Mr. Maurice Horton, who is in Venice on a blind date; Mr. Melville Orton, who is there to buy property, and Mr. Michael Laughton, a hired killer. The close homophony of the three names, all of which contain the traditionally confusing 'l' and 'r' sounds (see Section 3.3.), make up a rhetorical device known as a *homeoteulementon*. Add to this the typical Italian difficulty with where to voice and where not to voice initial 'h' and we have all the elements for cinematic farce generated by cross-talk (see Section 3).

Finally, in *Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2008, USA), Walt Kowalski (Eastwood) continually mispronounces the name of his Hmong neighbors because he despises them. For example he insists on calling Thao, 'Toad', until the boy insists, «It's not Toad, my name is Thao», after which Kowalski continues by calling his friends «Click-Clack, Ding-Dong and Charlie Chan» and the girl Thao especially likes «Miss What's-her-face» as if all Asians were the same. Kowalski then calls the girl «Yum Yum», to which Thao retorts: «You mean Youa? Kowalski does not hear and says «Yeah... Yum Yum... yeah... nice girl... nice girl, very charming». Amusing, but yet another example of the pre-eminence of the English language.





### 2.3 THE WORDS OF OTHERS Throughout *Everything is illuminated* Alex's broken English is used for humorous means:

My legal name is Alexander Perchov, but all of my friends dub me Alex [...] because this is much more flaccid to utter. That is Father retrieving his fist from the right side of my face. Father is a first-rate puncher. This is my miniature brother, Igor. I am tutoring him to be a man of this world. For an example, I exhibited him a smutty magazine three days yore. Why is it called sixty-nine? I explain it to him that this is because it was invented in the year. I know this because my friend Grisha knows a friend of the nephew of the inventor. What did people do before? He is a genius, my miniature brother. He will be made a VIP if I have a thing to do with it. This is Grandfather. Like my father and myself, he too is dubbed Alex. My grandmother, Anna, died two years before of a cancer in her brain. Precluding this, Grandfather became very melancholy [...] and also, he says, blind.

It is easy to imagine Alex thinking in his mother tongue and looking up every word he wants to learn in a dictionary. At every entry, he chooses a word from the list of available synonyms at random. Thus his friends *dub* rather than *call* him Alex; his little brother becomes his *miniature* brother, *tutoring* instead of *teaching*, *days of yore* in place of *three days ago* and so on. The register Alex uses is totally wrong and several expressions are obviously supposed to sound like translations, e.g. *flaccid* collocated with *to utter*; *first-rate* and *precluding this* in the wrong register. Whether audiences laugh at Alex or because of their ability to spot the translationese is a moot point.

Another example of the same technique can be found in cool Britannia movie *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, UK/USA, 2003). When English writer Jamie (Colin Firth) finally proposes to Aurelia (Lúcia Moniz): he does so in faulty Portuguese. The English subtitles translate what he says verbatim, errors and all, thus producing a humorous effect at which audiences laugh both with and at Jamie.

#### Dialogue 4

Jamie: *Boa noite*, Aurelia.

Aurelia: *Boa noite*, Jamie.

Jamie (subtitles): Beautiful Aurelia... I've come here with a view to asking you... to marriage me. Know I seem an insane person because I hardly knows you but sometimes things are so transpar-



ency, they don't need evidential proof. And I will inhabit here, or you can inhabit with me in England.

Aurelia's sister (subtitles): Definitely go for England, girl. You'll meet Prince William –then you can marry him instead.

Jamie (subtitles): Of course I don't expecting you to be as foolish as me, and of course I prediction you say no... But it's Christmas and I just wanted to... check.

Aurelia's sister (subtitles): Oh, God –say yes, you skinny moron.

Aurelia: Thank you. That will be nice. Yes is being my answer. Easy question.

Aurelia's father (subtitles): What did you say?

Aurelia (subtitles): Yes, of course.

Customers: Bravo!

Jamie: You learned English?

Aurelia: Just in cases.

Jamie's Portuguese is quite basic. Like Ukrainian Alex, he talks as though he has prepared his speech using a dictionary and a thesaurus as he continually uses lexis belonging to the wrong register. Rather than provide audiences with a translation in correct English, the subtitles accentuate his mistakes thus creating humour where perhaps, there was none in the speech itself. In other words, his broken Portuguese is not funny, but its translation is. Besides, Aurelia's faulty English is not funny until asked whether she has learned English to which she replies «Just in cases» which links in nicely to the subtitles reflecting Jamie's imperfect Portuguese.

### 3

#### *Cross-talk*

With the term *cross-talk* I will be referring to speech events containing instances of verbal humour caused by linguistic misunderstandings due to the inadequate proficiency of one of the participants in the language in which the conversation in question is couched.

**3.1 ACCIDENTAL CROSS-TALK** When a person's proficiency in a language is less than perfect, communicative errors are likely to occur. Naturally, such errors can result in comic situations. For example,



because of the mispronunciation of proper names Orton/Horton/Laughton in *Blame it on the Bellboy* (see 2.2) the plot develops into a full blown farce. However, the film *The Terminal* is excellent material for misunderstandings caused by poor language skills in English because the main character Viktor Navorski, a citizen of Krakozhia (*sic.*) with very little English, is denied access into the USA and is trapped in JFK International airport when his country is overthrown by rebels. As the film unravels, Victor (magically) picks up English and audiences are able to witness many instances of comic misunderstanding due to the rift between his English and that of his interlocutors. Among the various subplots of the film, Viktor plays cupid for Enrique Cruz, an airport janitor, who is in love with a customs officer, Dolores Torres. In Dialogue 5, Victor is explaining to Enrique that Dolores no longer has a boyfriend because she had left him as he had been unfaithful.

#### Dialogue 5

(*The Terminal*, Steven Spielberg, USA, 2004)

Enrique Cruz: So, she had a boyfriend, for how long?

Viktor Navorski: [*nods yes, holds up two fingers*]

Enrique Cruz: Two years, what happened?

Viktor Navorski: He chit.

Enrique Cruz: What?

Viktor Navorski: He chit.

Enrique Cruz: Eat shit?

Viktor Navorski: He chit, he chit, he chit.

Enrique Cruz: Okay, try to repeat exactly what she said.

Viktor Navorski: He chit, she catch him so...

Enrique Cruz: Oh! He cheats!

Viktor Navorski: Yes, yes, yes! What we call Krushkach. We say Krushkach. One man, two womans. So, hmm, crowded. You know? Ha!

Enrique Cruz: Okay, he \*cheats\*! You say cheats.

Viktor Navorski: Hm-hum. He chit.

Enrique Cruz: No, no. \*Cheat\*.

Viktor Navorski: Enrique, you, no chit.

Enrique Cruz: No cheat.

Viktor Navorski: No chit.

Enrique Cruz: Yeah, yeah, I won't. I won't. I won't cheat. Not chit.

Viktor Navorski: She's a nice... nice girl, she won't take your chitting.



The dialogue plays on Viktor's mispronunciation of the word *cheat*. The shortening of the longer central vowel /ɪ:/ of *cheat* to /ɪ/ leads Enrique firstly to totally misunderstand what Victor is saying by initially mistaking *chit* for *shit*. When Viktor finally manages to get his message across, further misunderstanding ensues because he continues to be unable to lengthen the *Please, check*. In reply to Enrique's «No, cheat» meaning 'No, you should pronounce it \*cheat\* and not 'chit', Viktor says «No chit» meaning 'Don't cheat'. In the end, Enrique begins pronouncing the word with a short vowel, echoes Viktor's broken English and negotiates «I won't cheat. No chit». An elegant piece of cross-talk, further enriched by Viktor's witty comment in broken English «one man, two womans... crowded».

From the film *Borat* we can find the same technique adopted by the 'other' who misunderstands the term *retired* for *retard* at a dinner of the Magnolia Fine Dining Society somewhere in Alabama. Of course the misunderstanding is deliberate as the entire film is based on the audience being game to Sacha Baron Cohen's pretence of being a Kazakh journalist.

#### Dialogue 6

Mike Jared (Magnolia Fine Dining Society): I'm, er... recently re-tired...

Borat: You are a retard?

Mike Jared: Er... yes...

Borat: Er... physical or mental?

Bethany Weston: Retired...

Mike Jared: RETIRED! I don't work anymore...

Bethany Weston: Stopped work...

Mike Jare: STOPPED WORKING!

Borat: [quietly across the table] Is very good you allow retard to, er... [mumbles politely]

Here the joke is also on the pronunciation of the central vowel sound in the word *retired* in Southern American English which tends to monophthongize /aɪ/ and merge towards the 'ah' sound typical of the Southern drawl. So although Borat understood perfectly well, he picks up the ambivalence to create cross-talk, which is all the funnier because it highly un-PC.



**3.2 DELIBERATE CROSS-TALK** Knowledge of a foreign language can be used to comedic advantage by setting up the ‘other’ as in two scenes from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Noulia Portokalis’ American fiancé Ian Miller (John Corbett) asks her brother Nick (Louis Mandylor) how to say *thank you* in Greek. Nick tells him that *thank you* is *Oréa viziá* in Greek. Ian thanks his mother-in-law in Greek only to learn that he has told her that she has «nice boobs». Later in the film, at the engagement party, Nick encourages Ian to say *eho tria orchidea* telling him that it is Greek for ‘everyone, let’s come in the house’. Not wanting to fall into the same trap again, Ian asks another Greek relative what the phrase means. Having ensured that the phrase means what Nick had said it means, Ian yells *eho tria orchidea* to all the guests while, in truth, it is Greek for ‘I’ve got three testicles’.

A similar technique is adopted in *The Terminal*. A Russian tourist, Milodragovich, who speaks no English is about to have some medication confiscated by border police. He is desperate to export the medicine which is for his sick father. Viktor is asked to mediate between Milodragovich and the authorities. Viktor speaks Bulgarian and Milodragovich Russian, but they understand each other as Victor explains that the drug must be confiscated. However, feeling sorry for the Russian, Viktor suddenly claims that Milodragovich needs the medicine for his goat. The authorities practically accuse him of lying, but Viktor defends himself by saying that in the language of Krakozhia «the name for *father* sound like *goat* I make mistake». However, both examples work on a deliberate exploitation of gaps in linguistic knowledge of the other who becomes the butt of the joke.

In a well known scene from *La Vita è Bella* (Roberto Benigni, 1999) a Gestapo officer is instructing prisoners on their work duties. Guido (Benigni), who presumably speaks no German but understands the gist of what is being said, deliberately mistranslates the officer’s orders so as to make his young son believe that it is all a game. The officer who speaks German is not subtitled.

Dialogue 7

Corporal: *Alles herhören. Ich sage das nur einmal!*

Guido: *Comincia il gioco... chi c’è c’è, chi non c’è non c’è!*

[The game begins... whoever’s here is here, whoever’s not here isn’t here!]

Corporal: *Ihr seid nur einem einzigen Grund in dieses Lager transportiert Worden!*



Guido: *Si vince a mille punti...il primo classificato vince un carro armato vero...*

[You can win 1000 points... the winner gets a real armed tank...]

Corporal: *Um zu arbeiten!*

Guido: *beato lui!* [Lucky him!]

Corporal: *Jeder versuch der Sabotage wird mit dem Sortfortigen Tode bestraft.*

*Die Hinrichtungen finden auf dem Hof durch Schüsse in den Rücken statt.*

Guido: *Ogni giorno vi daremo la classifica generale... là da quell'altoparlante che sta fuori! All'ultimo classificato attacheremo un cartello con scritto 'asino' sulla schiena!*

[We'll read out a chart every day... from the loudspeaker out there!

Whoever's last on the list gets a label with the word *Ass* stuck on his back!]

Corporal: *Ihr habt die Ehre, für unser grosses Deutsches Vaterland arbeiten zu dürfen, und am Bau des grossdeutschen Reiches teilzunehmen.*

Guido: *Noi facciamo la parte di quelli cattivi che urlano. Quelli che hanno paura perdono punti.* [We're the bad guys who shout. Anyone who's scared loses points.]

In this example the joke is not on the German soldier at all. However, significantly the German is not subtitled as, presumably, from the tone of what is being said and with viewers' knowledge of historical events, the message is clear. Benigni shouts out the dialogue emulating the soldier's tone. Dark as it may be, humour is created through the incongruity of what he is saying and the reality of the co-text.

**3.3 INTERFERENCE-BASED MONOLINGUAL CROSS-TALK** This type of play is based on the transfer of the articulatory habits of one group of people onto another. To illustrate this category I shall borrow an example from Delabastita (2005: 167) in which the American First Lady asks the Japanese ambassador when he has elections. The ambassador, visibly embarrassed, replies: «Before breakfast». And it is the 'l'/r' confusion frequently made by the Japanese which is found in the well known scene in *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003, USA) in which a Japanese sex worker comes to Bob's hotel room to offer him her services



Dialogue 8

Woman: My stockings, lip them! (laughs) Lip my stockings! Yes prease. Lip them!

Bob: What?

Woman: Lip them, he! Lip my stockings.

Bob: Hey, Lip them, lip them, what?

Woman: Lip them, like this, lip them

Bob: Rip them?

Wo Bob: Bob You want me to rip your stockings?...

Woman: Yes rip my stockings prease!

Bob: Rip your stockings, you want me to rip your stockings all right

Woman: Prease, prease, prease!

Bob: I'm gonna rip your stockings and you tell Mr Kazuzu, you know, we had a blast...

However, I would like to argue that the comic effect is not only conveyed at the level of utterance, but at the level of *scene*. Bob (Bill Murray) is tired and has no intention of having sex with the Japanese lady and his intonation, gestures and facial expressions are what really render the scene funny –more so than the stereotypical linguistic interference of *rip/lip*. The woman is rollicking around on the floor and Bob is sitting on the edge of his bed looking bored, he simply throws his arms up in the air totally speechless. The incongruity of the scene is just as funny as the wordplay.

**3.4 TRANSLATION-BASED MONOLINGUAL CROSS-TALK** In Claude Kaplisch's *L'Auberge espagnole* (2002, France) students from six different European countries share a flat in Barcelona –the perfect setting for cross-talk. In one scene, English Wendy receives a phone call from the mother of her French flatmate and misunderstands the word *fac* for the well known, similar sounding, English taboo word.

Dialogue 9

French Mother: (incomprehensible voice).

Wendy: Oh hum... okay *espera*, wait... «*Xavier nest pas là... il va revnir ce soir...!*» Okay? Yeah? ... hum...

Mother: (incomprehensible voice).

Wendy: «*Xavier nest pas là... il va revnir cé soir... »*



Mother: *Oui, mais vers quelle heure?*

Wendy: I'm sorry, I don't understand French *je ne comprends pas le français*.

Mother: *Bon ben. Dites-lui de téléphoner à sa mère.*

Wendy: Oh?

Mother: *Sa maman*

Wendy: *Maman!* Okay, I will tell him!

Mother: *Bon. C'est sûr, hein?*

Wendy: Xavier is gone to school, okay?

Mother: *Ah, oui, bien sûr. Il est à la fac!*

Wendy: What!?

Wendy: *La fac!*

Wendy: «La fuck»!?

Wendy: Yes! After *fac*, he can telephone *maman*.

The English f-word is common knowledge worldwide and here it is played off against its near (French) homophone *fac*. While Xavier's mother asks Wendy to tell him to phone her when he gets back from lectures, Wendy understands that he is to phone her after something quite different. Delabastita reports the frequent use of such puns in Shakespeare, especially between the European royalty depicted in his plays (2005, 172-173).

#### 4

#### *Pseudo-language*

Adenoid Hynkel's famous address at the rally of the Sons and Daughters of the Double Cross in *The Great Dictator* is possibly the most well known example of pseudo-language on screen. The speech is intoned in a German sounding fashion and is copiously peppered with words like *Wienerschnitzel* and *Sauerkraut*, but what is actually said is nothing more than gibberish. Furthermore, the speech is supplemented with a voiced over interpretation in English which, in serious contrast with Hynkel's gibberish, further adds to the comic effect of the scene. The underlying message clearly gets across and it was not surprising that the film was banned in many parts of Europe especially if we consider that another character in the film is Benzino Napaloni (*benzina* is Italian for *petrol*). Modelled on Benito Mussolini, Napaloni's Italian sounding English in utterances such as: