

English-Vietnamese Translation Strategies of Subtitles Involving Humor in the TV Series “Modern Family”

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to (a) identify the joke types in the TV series “Modern Family” (Season 1) and (b) analyze the different strategies used by fansubbers to translate the jokes. Accordingly, Raphaelson-West’s (1989) model of joke types and summative content analysis were employed to analyse 100 joke samples. Results showed all three types of universal, cultural, and linguistic jokes were found in the first season with universal jokes accounting for the largest number. Six main strategies were applied to translate the jokes, including literal translation, explicitation, loan, compensation, transposition, and lexical recreation. As the most popular strategy, literal translation was proved to effectively render universal jokes only. Meanwhile, regarding cultural and linguistic jokes, strategies such as compensation, transposition, and lexical recreation, although being used at a much lower frequency, helped to create a kind of dynamic equivalence and ensured there was wordplay somewhere near the source language pun.

KEYWORDS: English-Vietnamese translation, fansubbers, humor, Modern Family, subtitling, translation strategies

1. Introduction

Audiovisual translation (AVT) is an emerging sub-branch of translation studies that is

experiencing an unprecedented expansion due to digitalization and the rapid development of technology. Research on AVT began as early as 1932, yet not until the 1990s was AVT considered a part of the discipline (Tee et al. 2022). Audiovisual translation (AVT) refers to the rendition of audiovisual products and consists of three modes, namely, dubbing, voice-over and subtitling (Pedersen 2011). Dubbing is supplanting the original sound recording by the target language (TL) one while voice-over decreases the volume of the sound recording, followed by the superimposition of the TL sound recording, and subtitling is the written presentation of dialogues in TL (ibid.).

Among the three modes, the most notable development in translation studies has been witnessed in the area of subtitling (Munday 2016). Subtitling can be divided into professional subtitling and fansubbing. Professional subtitling is the traditional version of subtitling where the subtitlers are professionally trained and paid to translate source language (SL) scripts of films shown in the theaters or released in the form of DVDs (Díaz-Cintas 2010). Meanwhile, fansubbers “distinguish themselves from other AVT types through their unauthorized and unregulated exploration of new technologies, with fans identified as particularly adept consumers or ‘lead users’” (Von Hippel 1986, as cited in Tessa Dwyer 2019: 436).

In the present study, the researchers chose to focus on translation strategies to deal with humorous elements in the fansubs of the American TV series named *Modern Family* (season 1). As the name suggests, the series explores various family dynamics from very traditional family to blended family, and even a more recent concept of LGBT+ family, providing the audience with a fresh and inclusive perspective on modern relationships. The first season of the comedy show is renowned for its sharp-witted humor and a mockumentary style which allows the audience to easily connect with the characters and their humorous situations. Specifically, it touches on relevant social issues and challenges and usually addresses them with humor and sensitivity, which provokes thoughts in viewers.

Given its distinct characteristics, especially the simultaneous presence of the sound and vision channels (Munday 2016), subtitling poses a notable challenge, especially when addressing comedic elements. The culture-bound items/expressions included in jokes have been proved

arduous even for traditional professional translators (Chiaro 2008). Meanwhile, fansubbers are non-professional translators who tend to render subtitles in a way that they find “suitable” rather than follow “orthodox translation standards” (Wang 2014: 1904). As a result, it is worth investigating how the subtitles that involve different types of humor have been translated by fansubbers under the light of translation theories. The research, therefore, aims to address two questions as follows:

1. What types of humor are found in the first season of the TV series “Modern Family”?
2. What are the translation strategies employed to deal with different humor types?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Fansubbing

Fansubbing, as stated by Vazquez-Calvo et al. (2019: 194), is the translation of audiovisual content carried out by fans and is one of the four types of fan translation alongside with *fandubbing* (i.e., “enactment of fan translated dialogues of audiovisual content”), *romhacking* or fan translation of games, and *scanlation* (i.e., manga and comics scanning and translation). Over the past years, the growth of digital videos as well as video services and platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, iQiyi and Amazon Prime (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2020) has resulted in a huge demand for video subtitles to be translated into different languages to approach more viewers. Therefore, from the initial purpose of distributing translated subtitles of Japanese cartoons or anime in the 1980s (Carmona & Lee 2017), fansubbing has been expanded to other categories such as films, TV shows, interviews of celebrities, and music videos.

As noted by Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz-Sánchez (2006), the fansubbing process involves a group of people, each having a specific role as follows:

- Raw providers for providing the source material to be used for the translation
- Translators for translating the subtitles from a particular language into another
- Timers for setting the in-and-out times of each subtitle
- Typesetters for defining the fonts of the subtitles

- Editors and proofreaders for revising and correcting the translation to ensure coherence and naturalness
- Encoders for producing the subtitled version of a given episode by using software

Since most fansubbers do not possess professional training in the use of fansub technology, their contribution is limited to translation only (Díaz-Cintas & Sánchez 2006). As amateur subtitle translators (Bold 2011), they are also untied to mainstream translation theories but care mainly about finding suitable words and phrases to render the source text (Wang 2014). Therefore, fansubs are often “more creative and individualistic” (Tee et al. 2022: 6) as well as “more flexible and contain a lot of colloquial language and slangs” compared to traditionally translated ones (Wang 2014: 1904).

2.2. Humor

2.2.1. Conceptual theories

Humor is a universal concept that forms an essential component of any culture or civilization. The present study looked at three popular theories of humor, including Relief/Release theory, Superiority theory and Incongruity theory.

John Morreall (1986) detailed the Relief/Release theory proposed by Sigmund Freud in 1905, which encompasses three types of laughter situations, including jokes, comics, and humor. In any case, laughter is acknowledged to functionally discharge anxious energy that is gathered for a psychological task and then disappears with the task. This theory evidently illustrates an approach from the psychoanalytical perspective. Also, in Morreall’s (1986) study, the Superiority theory encompasses laughter that stems from feelings of superiority over other people or over a former state of ourselves. In other words, self-comparison and the abrupt glory over oneself or another person are conditional for laughter. For example, people laugh at others for their lack of knowledge or their perceivable flaws. Meanwhile, Incongruity theory posits that humor occurs when there is a contradiction between what is spoken and what the addressee expects to hear, which often results in laughter (Alnusairat 2022). Victor Raskin (1984) observed that the Superiority theory expounds on the social-behavioral aspect of humor, while the Incongruity theory accounts for its cognitive-perceptual aspect.

2.2.2. Classifications

To examine the concept of humor from the linguistic perspective, many models of humor classification have been suggested. Phanchalee Treetrupetch et al. (2017) referred to a complex typology of humor proposed by Debra Long and Arthur Graesser in 1988 that comprises nonsense, philosophical, scatological or bathroom humor, hostile, sexual humor, social satire, ethnic humor, demeaning to men, demeaning to women and sick humor. From a different approach, Patrick Zabalbeascoa (1996) divided humor into seven categories, viz., international joke, bi-national joke, national-culture-institutions joke, national-sense-of humor joke, language-dependent joke, visual joke, and complex joke.

Debra S. Raphaelson-West (1989), however, suggested a way of classifying humor that is plainly elementary. In fact, it was designed to facilitate the translation of humorous expressions by arranging jokes that share certain characteristics into groups. This step is considered as content analysis, a part of the translation process that, according to Raphaelson-West (1989), helps the translator to be in a better position to render jokes appropriately. The model consists of three categories, namely, (a) linguistic jokes, i.e., puns playing with ambiguous words that can suggest multiple meanings, (b) cultural jokes, i.e., the type of joke that could be comprehended by a specific group of people that share the same culture or approximate ones, and universal jokes, i.e. jokes that can be construed to be easily understood and accepted by all cultures (Raphaelson-West 1989). Among these, universal jokes are considered the most lucid type; thus, the rendition of such jokes to another language is the least complicated. Sharing a similar point of view, John Robert Schmitz (2006: 89) suggests that trainee translators “deal first with the relatively straightforward universal humor”, then move on to the more demanding cultural humor, and finally deal with linguistic humor “that offers serious challenges to students of foreign languages and translation.”

Since the focus of this study is to examine the translation strategies applied to jokes, dividing a heterogeneous group of jokes into distinctive ones can help to analyze and observe the data better. Besides, authors such as Alnusairat (2022) and Sadeghpour and Omar (2015) also employed the classification by Raphaelson-West as an efficient supplementary tool to

evaluate the translation of humorous expressions. Hence, this model will be utilized to codify humorous expressions in the present study.

2.3. Translation of subtitles that involve humor

2.3.1. Challenges of subtitling that involves humor

The most strenuous and intricate aspect of translating subtitles with humor elements is handling culture-bound terms (Tisgam 2009), i.e., “concepts, institutions and personnel specific to the SL culture” (Harvey 2000: 2). As Cláudia Suzano de Almeida (2016) puts it, the translation of humor requires cultural references to be shared among individuals from two or more language and culture groups as well as the linguistic compatibility between these groups. Therefore, a significant challenge when translating humor is finding a way in another language to convey a reference that does not fit into any existing system of meaning. Besides, humor translation is dependent on a number of extratextual factors such as the translator’s skills and creativity, sense of humor, and the priorities and constraints that translators and commissioners set for each translation task (Bucaria 2017). This view is shared by Jeroen Vandaele (2002), who asserts that the translator must deal with the intended effect of humor and that comprehending humor and rendering humor are two different skills. For such reasons, culture-specific items are regarded as one of the most topical issues in translation research for their low translatability (Horbacauskiene et al. 2016) and even untranslatability in some cases (Tomaszkiewicz 1993; Zabalbeascoa 1996).

On the other hand, the complexity of the translation of culture-bound items lies in the employment of descriptive translation techniques, resulting in longer texts produced in the target language (Horbacauskiene et al. 2016). However, there is only enough room for about 30-40 characters/spaces and a maximum of three lines of text across the screen bottom (Munday 2016; O’Connell 2016). This often leads to omission or inadequate rendering of culture-bound items, making subtitling a vulnerable form of audiovisual translation, i.e., being judged and criticized by viewers who know the source language (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007).

2.3.2. Strategies to translate subtitles that involve humor

To deal with such a problematic area of translation studies, i.e., subtitling humor, linguistic scholars such as Delia Chiaro (2008) developed sets of strategies based on foreignization and domestication. While foreignization purports to retain “a kind of exotic flavor” of the SL culture (Feng 1993, cited in Wang 2014: 2424) by faithfully translating the SL texts, domestication strives to “minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for TL readers” (Shuttleworth 2014: 44) by rendering unusual expressions in SL texts into concepts that sound familiar in TL. In other words, foreignization is a source-culture-oriented translation while domestication is a target-culture-oriented one.

Based on these two approaches, Henrik Gottlieb (1992) proposed 10 subtitling strategies, namely, paraphrase, imitation, expansion, transcription, condensation, deletion, resignation, dislocation, decimation, and transfer. Despite the large number of strategies, some do overlap. For example, condensation, deletion, resignation, and decimation all refer to the omission of parts of the subtitles but for different purposes. Another model by Jan Pedersen (2011) encompasses two divisions of ST-oriented and TT-oriented strategies. The former consists of retention, specification, and direct translation while the latter covers generalization, cultural substitution, and omission. Meanwhile, Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007) propose a typology comprising nine strategies of loan, calque (literal translation), explicitation, substitution, transposition, lexical recreation, compensation, omission, and addition. Though the authors do not explicitly separate strategies into groups, it can be observed that the first two strategies are SL-oriented while the remaining are TL-oriented.

In the present study, Díaz-Cintas and Remael’s (2007) model is chosen as the most suitable because it provides a variety of non-overlapping strategies, which allows an insight into the translation of research data and effectively addresses the considerable difference in syntactic structure and lexicalization between English and Vietnamese languages. The strategies are as follows:

- *Loan*, whereby the SL word or phrase is incorporated into the TL text because of its untranslatability. These words can be city names such as Boston or Los Angeles, culinary specialties such as pizza or lasagna, and drinks such as soda or cocktail.

- *Calque* or literal translation with minimum changes, in which the source text is translated into its nearest target equivalent. For instance, the two phrases “Secretary of State” and “Minister of Foreign Affairs” were respectively translated into Spanish as “*Secretario de Estado*” and “*Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores*” thanks to the similar syntactic structures between the two languages.
- *Explicitation*, which refers to the clarification of a source language concept or expression via either specification using a synonym or generalization using a hypernym. Examination of Díaz-Cintas and Remael’s (2007: 203) examples of explicitation showed that generalization is not only to tackle the non-equivalence but also to explain the term or phrase, and the use of hypernym is expansive and “often dictated by the need for transparency”. Hypernym also includes the rendition of “brand names or abbreviations by the institution or concept they stand for” (ibid.). For example, HYPISM, which stands for Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, and MIT, can be translated into Vietnamese as “*nhóm trường Đại học hàng đầu của Mỹ*” (the top universities in the U.S.).
- *Substitution*, a variation of explicitation to deal with the spatial constraint that a rather long term or phrase shall not be inserted on the screen even if the SL word has its equivalence in the target culture. For example, “a concierge” can be translated as “*nhân viên giữ cửa*” (an employee who takes care of the entrance of a building or hotel) in Vietnamese, but sometimes the translator would simplify it into “*bảo vệ*” whose back translation is “a guard”. This substitution is attributed to the fact that “a guard” and “a concierge” have more or less the same duty, yet “*bảo vệ*” is much shorter than “*nhân viên giữ cửa*”.
- *Transposition*, a strategy “to implicitly clarify or explain the SL cultural references by a similar TL concept” which is most effective when “the concepts referred to are not too different” (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007: 204). Take “bogeyman” as an example. The word can be translated into Vietnamese as “*ông kẹ*” (a scary man) or “*ông ba bị*” (an ugly, ragged man carrying three bags for capturing kids), since in the corresponding cultures, these characters are all used to frighten children. Besides, this strategy involves the replacement of famous people or places in the source culture with similar TL ones because they may be unrecognized in the target culture.

The adaptation of the measurements and currencies in use in the target culture is also one prominent practice of transposition. For instance, 40 inches can be converted into “*xấp xỉ 100 cm*” (approximately 100 centimeters) or “*xấp xỉ 1 mét*” (approximately 1 meter) in Vietnamese.

- *Lexical recreation* refers to the coinage of a new word in the TL text since the SL word itself is also a product of neologism (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007), which encompasses “terms of social sciences, slang, [and] dialect coming into the mainstream of language” (Newmark 1988: 140). In fact, translating neologisms is regarded as a strenuous task, even the “biggest problem” that professional translators face since some of them are “short-lived, individual creations” (ibid.). For example, in the famous American sitcom “Friends”, a character coined the word “*mustartastrophe*”, a combination of “*mustard*” and “*catastrophe*”, to describe a situation when the mustard is spilled out onto the tablecloth (Khan & Jelveh 2013). This word is the product of improvisation that is only used once in the show, thereby does not get into the dictionary.
- *Compensation* refers to the over-translating or supplement of SL text with an analogous effect to offset the translational loss. In other words, it is a special strategy to reach the equivalence where there is no equivalent concept or appropriate expression in the TL (Cui 2012). Compensation is regarded as “a blessing for the translation of humorous films” (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007: 205). Hervey and Higgins (1992: 46) consolidated this point by stating that humor, without using compensation, is “notoriously difficult to translate”.
- *Omission*, whereby the cultural reference is omitted altogether. Despite concerns that the source text might be inaccurately translated (Newmark 1988), misrepresented, or distorted as a result of omission (Khanmohammad & Aminzad 2015), the strategy is still frequently employed. In subtitling, reasons vary but mostly it is due to the lack of the equivalent TL word and the limit of space and time (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007). In some other cases, the cultural or religious constraints of TL viewers also justify the employment of omission. For example, cursing and filthy language are banned by Islamic Law and by social norms in Iran, so translators tend to eliminate

vulgar expressions (e.g., “fuck”, “shit”, “damn it”, “asshole”) from subtitles of English series or movies that target Iranian viewers.

- *Addition*, also referred to as amplification, in which “the TL uses more words, often because of syntactic expansion” (Vinay & Darbelnet 1995/2004, cited in Munday 2016: 92). Similar to omission, addition also raises concerns about the distortion of the original meaning of the source text (Khanmohammad & Aminzad 2015; Newmark 1988). However, in subtitling, it augments the understanding of the TL audiences when they are not familiar with the SL cultural references or the way the speaker delivers a message.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research method

This study adopts summative content analysis as a suitable method to address the two research questions. The method “involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context” (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1277). Specifically, the researchers manually search the dataset (i.e., the English subtitles of the first season of “Modern Family”) to identify and quantify phrases or sentences that involve humor, with their contexts or settings also noted, in order to understand their contextual use (Berkovic 2023). The samples are then classified into humor types using Raphaelson-West’s (1989) model, and their translations are also extracted from the Vietnamese subtitles. This method does not merely count the occurrence of phrases or sentences involving humor but also incorporates the analysis of translation strategies that were employed to render them. Despite its limitation in providing the broader meaning present in the data (Hsieh & Shannon 2005), the summative approach to qualitative content analysis has the advantages of being a simple and systematic way to study the phenomenon of interest (Berkovic 2023).

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Data used for this research come from the first season of a TV series entitled “Modern Family”, which was first aired on ABC, an American TV channel, in 2009. Season one consists

of 24 episodes, each lasting about 20 minutes. The story follows the ordinary lives of three families: the nuclear family of Phil and Claire, the blended family of Jay and Gloria, and lastly the same-sex family of Cameron and Mitchell.

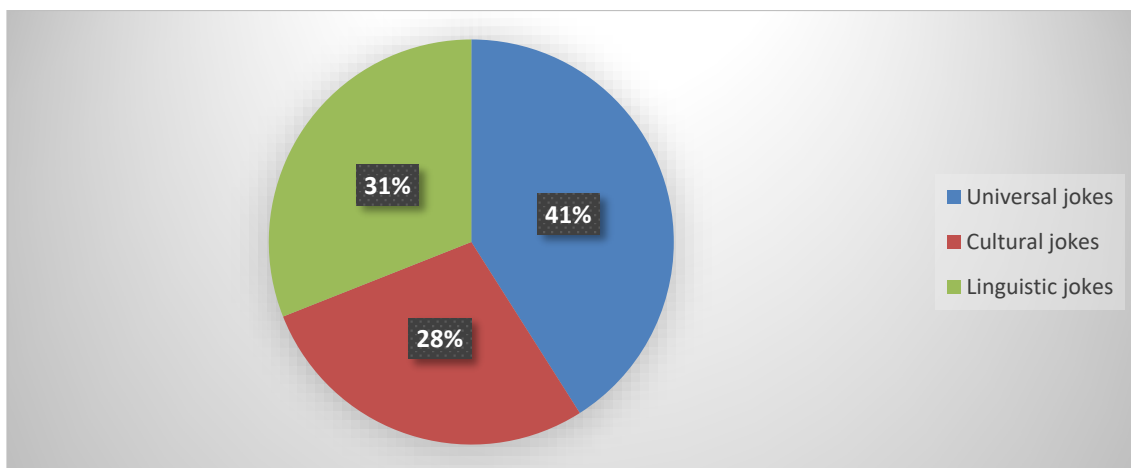
The full English and Vietnamese subtitles of the series, which were directly translated by the fan community, were collected from the fansubbing website motchilli.org in December 2022. This website provides subbed and dubbed movies of all types (e.g., horror, thriller, romantic, comedy, TV show, etc.) from both Asian and Western countries such as Thailand, China, Korea, Japan, India, and Italy. Regarding the first season of the TV show “Modern Family”, a total of 100 jokes randomly selected from the 24 episodes were analyzed using summative content analysis. These, together with their contexts and episodes, were all noted down by Notion, a website application that facilitates the process of recording study data. After that, the humor units were classified into types of jokes and the strategies that are used to translate them based on frameworks presented in the literature review, i.e., Raphaelson-West (1989) and Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007).

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. A breakdown of humor types found in the first season of “Modern Family”

Figure 1 illustrates a breakdown of humor types in the first season of “Modern Family” according to Raphaelson-West’s (1989) model. Among the 100 humor units, universal jokes predominate with 41% out of total. Linguistic jokes (31%) and cultural jokes (28%) seem to be equally popular, with a 3-point difference. This might be explained by the fact that a greater number of universal jokes that can be easily understood and accepted by all cultures (Raphaelson-West 1989) would enable a TV series to reach global viewers on a larger scale. Meanwhile, the other two types of jokes might be appropriate to a more limited group of audience due to their polysemy or the requirement to share the same or approximate culture.

Figure 1. A breakdown of humor types



4.2. Translation strategies used to render different joke types

Regarding the translation of the samples, six main strategies were applied, including literal translation, explicitation, loan, compensation, transposition, and lexical recreation. As is seen in Figure 2, literal translation predominates, accounting for nearly half of the 100 instances. Its frequency is over three times higher than explicitation, loan, and compensation with only 14, 13 and 11 samples, respectively. Transposition was used much less frequently with five cases, and lexical recreation was the least popular, being used only twice. Addition and omission were not employed as individual strategies in this study but in combination with another one to form couplets (Newmark 1988). Two types of couplets were found, including the literal and omission couplet (once) and the loan and addition couplet (four times).

Figure 2. Strategies employed to render jokes in the first season of “Modern Family”

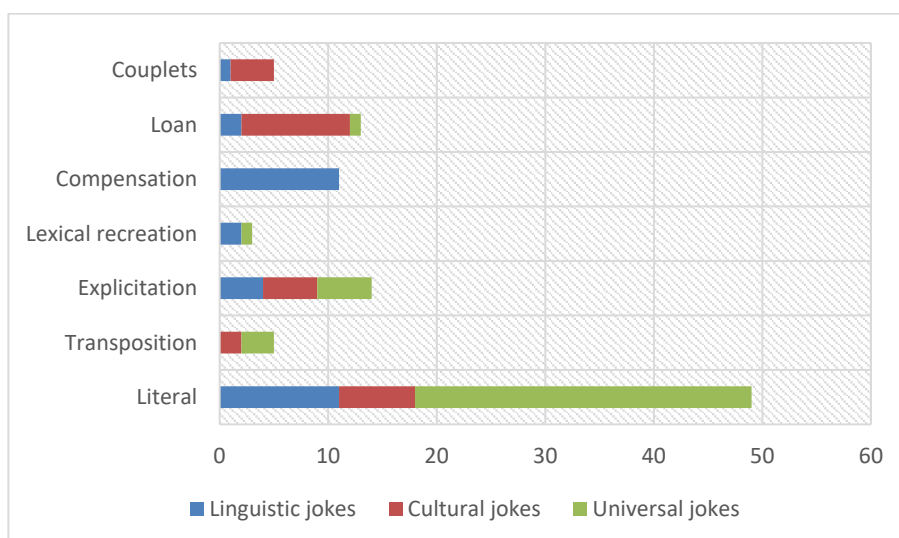


Figure 2 also shows a distinctive pattern of translation strategies being applied to different types of jokes. For example, literal translation and explicitation were the two strategies employed to render all three joke types. However, compensation and lexical recreation were used almost exclusively for linguistic jokes. Meanwhile, jokes related to culture were mainly translated using loans and couplets.

4.2.1. *Literal translation*

As mentioned earlier, literal translation was applied to all three types of jokes, yet it was used most frequently to render universal jokes. This can be explained by the fact that the joke type is straightforward (Schmitz 2006) and is the least difficult to translate (Raphaelson-West 1989). In other words, the jokes themselves reside at the semantic level, and the contexts or the situations act as a build-up for the jokes rather than amusing word effects or the association to a certain reference specific to a group of people. A case in point (episode 1) is presented below.

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
- A soccer audience: Oh, and this must be your dad - Jay: Her dad? - A soccer audience: Yeah - Jay: No, no, that's funny. <i>Actually, I am her husband.</i>	- Người xem bóng: Đây hẳn là bố cô. - Jay: Bố á? - Người xem bóng: Vâng - Jay: Không đâu, buồn cười thật. <i>Thật ra tôi là chồng của cô ấy.</i>	- A soccer audience: This must be your dad. - Jay: Dad? - A soccer audience: Yeah - Jay: No, that's funny. <i>Actually, I am her husband.</i>

For a brief context, Jay and Gloria are a couple with a huge age gap. Gloria is a gorgeous young lady while Jay is over 50 years old. This is the first time Jay and Gloria have been introduced to the audience as husband and wife. Because of Jay's aged appearance, an attendee whom they meet at a football match mistakes him for Gloria's father. Jay's unexpected answer results in laughter and is easily recognizable by the TL audience. Additionally, the structure of this sentence (in bold) is simple and can be transferred directly into the nearest Vietnamese equivalent without sounding awkward.

However, when it comes to linguistic and cultural jokes, conveying the effect of the jokes was not that easy. In particular, the TL viewers may have no knowledge of the mentioned concepts, leading to the inability to understand the literal translation of the joke among those who find the source language and culture unfamiliar. For example:

No.	Source text	Target text	Back translation
1	Phil's dad: He sheds. I made the mistake of letting him sleep with me on the road. Now my sheets look like two Bigfoots did it.	<i>Cha Phil: Nó rụng lông đấy. Bố đã mắc sai lầm khi cho nó ngủ cùng trên đường. Giờ chăn bố cứ như do hai tên chân to làm vậy.</i>	Phil's dad: He sheds. I made the mistake of letting him sleep with me on the road. Now my sheets look like two big-feet guys did it.
2	- Claire: Hi, Luke's math teacher, Ms. Passwater . - Phil: Passwater?	- Claire: <i>Chào cô Passwater, giáo viên dạy toán của Luke.</i> - Phil: <i>Đi tè á?</i>	- Claire: Hi, Luke's math teacher, Ms. Passwater . - Phil: Go pee-pee?

In the two examples above (episodes 21 and 15, respectively), the cultural reference, “two Bigfoots” and the pun regarding the word “Passwater” were literally translated. This can be confusing for the TL audience since in case (1) the appearance of the two big-feet guys seems disconnected with what the speaker said. In fact, a Bigfoot is a mysterious hairy, ape-like creature living in the forests of North America, and the speaker is complaining that the dog left too much hair on his bed as if two Bigfoots did. However, without any further explanation from the translator, it is difficult for the TL viewers to comprehend the joke. For case (2), “Passwater” is an English surname concurrently understood as “go pee-pee”. This, according to Peter Alan Low (2011), demonstrates a special problem that puns create for translators, i.e., the humorous intent of puns or wordplay is based on specific features of a particular language. Meanwhile, the application of literal translation in this case did not create equivalent punning words in Vietnamese, thus failing to deliver the joke.

4.2.2. *Explicitation*

In this study, explicitation is the second most popular strategy to translate universal jokes, although its number is not comparable to that of literal translation. Explicitation refers to the introduction of information which is presented implicitly in the source language into the target language by deriving from the context or situation (Vinay & Darbelnet 1958, as cited in Klaudy 1996). Below is an example from episode 4:

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
- Claire: What are you laughing at? - Claire's mom: Karma is a funny thing.	- Claire: <i>Mẹ cười gì thế?</i> - Claire's mom: Mẹ cười luật nhân quả thôi.	- Claire: What are you laughing at? - Claire's mom: I'm just laughing at karma.

Claire used to resent her mother for being too strict with her when she was young, but now she is doing the same thing to her daughter. The context of the humor shows that Claire is being mocked by her mother. However, the sentence “Karma is a funny thing” would not be readily understood as a humorous element to Vietnamese audience if it was literally translated into “*Luật nhân quả là một thứ buồn cười*”. Therefore, the expression was clarified as “I’m just laughing at karma” (*Mẹ cười luật nhân quả thôi*) to make it more specific and relatable to viewers.

Despite its explanatory function, explicitation fails in delivering the jokes in all cases, such as in the following linguistic joke in episode 20:

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
- Tech guy: Do you guys surf? - Mitchell: Only for bargains on the Web.	- Nhân viên: <i>Các anh có lướt sóng không?</i> - Mitchell: <i>Chỉ để mặc cả trên mạng thôi.</i>	- Tech guy: Do you guys ride the waves? - Mitchell: Only for bargaining on the Internet.

It is quite obvious that Mitchell, the second speaker, made a pun with the word “surf”. “Surf”

can be understood as an activity in which people ride on the waves using a board or search for information on the Internet (Cambridge online dictionary). Explication was used to clarify the first meaning of “surf”, i.e., “*lướt sóng*” (ride the waves), yet, the second implication of the word was rendered literally, making it difficult for the TL audience to see the humor. In this case, compensation might be a better choice “to ensure there is wordplay somewhere near the pun” (Low 2011: 67). Specifically, the reply by Mitchell (only for bargains on the Web) should be translated into “*Chỉ lướt mạng thôi*” (only surfing the web), thus creating a pun in Vietnamese with the verb “*lướt*”, i.e. “*lướt sóng*” and “*lướt mạng*”.

4.2.3. *Loan*

Loan was used to deal mainly with cultural jokes in this study. However, this joke type tends to pose greater difficulty due to its association with a particular culture (Low 2011).

Therefore, the preservation of a cultural reference in the translation without any further explanation from the translator can be confusing to the TL viewers. Consider the following example from episode 18:

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
Cameron: Honestly, I wish that tart would go back to Columbia and take her weird little Brown with her.	<i>Cameron: Thật tình, em mong con khôn đó biến về Columbia cùng gã lùn Brown kì quái.</i>	Cameron: Honestly, I wish that tart would go back to Columbia with her weird Brown dwarf.

In this example, Cameron was criticizing one of his friends whose boyfriend went to Brown university. Coincidentally, Gloria, his step mother-in-law, passed by and accidentally heard this saying without knowing the context. She was a “brown” person who immigrated from Columbia with her little son named Manny. Hence, she mistook that Cameron was referring to her and his son. In the Vietnamese translation, the word “Brown” was preserved without any added explanation about its connotations, rendering the characters’ reactions in the scene hard to understand for the TL viewers.

4.2.4. *Compensation*

Compensation was solely used to handle linguistic jokes to preserve the impact of this joke

type. For example:

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
Are things still good with Phil the Thrill ?	<i>Mọi chuyện vẫn tốt với Phil Phiêu lưu chứ?</i>	Are things still good with Adventurous Phill ?

The phrase “Phil the Thrill” is a pun generated from the similarity of the last sound in “Phil” and “Thrill”. When translating this nickname to Vietnamese, the translator(s) created a Vietnamese version of Phil’s nickname that still involves a rhyme between sounds in component words but does not completely alter the original meaning of the word “thrill”. In particular, the pronunciation of the consonant /f/ in “Phil” rhymes with that in “*phiêu*”, and the word “*Phiêu lưu*” (adventurous) does preserve a shade of meaning of “thrill”. Therefore, this linguistic joke was handled quite satisfactorily.

4.2.5. Transposition

Among the six strategies employed, transposition was considered as the most effective to translate jokes, resulting in translations that are both equivalent to the SL version and friendly to the TL audience.

In the following example from episode 4, Haley and Alex, who are sister and brother but are always fighting each other, really got along well that day and even happily played a chanting game. This unexpected harmony created an amusing atmosphere.

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
Harley: Miss Mary, Mack, Mack, Mack. All dressed in black, black, black. With silver buttons, buttons, buttons. All down her back, back, back.	Harley: <i>Vuốt ve em thân yêu em ở với ai? Em ở với bà. Bà gì? Bà ngoại. Ngoại xâm. Xâm gì?</i>	Harley: Caress my dear. Who are you with? Grandmom. Awesome. Here she comes. With your mom.

“Miss Mary Mack” is the most popular hand-clapping game in various English-speaking countries, in which two children stand or sit opposite to each other and clap hands in time to a rhyming song. In Vietnam, kids do play a similar hand-clapping game but of course singing

a different rhyming song. Therefore, the replacement of a SL item (i.e., the rhyming song) with a similar one in the target language, i.e., transposition, is the most effective strategy (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2007). It also shows the flexibility of the fansubber(s) in this case (Wang 2014).

Another typical example is shown below.

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
Phil: I am a cool dad [...] I text: - “LOL” - Laugh out loud (1) - “OMG” - Oh my god (2) - “WTF” - Why the face ? (3)	Phil: <i>Tôi là một ông bố ngẫu. [...]. Tôi nhắn tin:</i> - “ <i>Ahihi</i> ” - <i>Cười kiểu mới.</i> (1) - “ <i>QTQĐ</i> ” - <i>Quá trời quá đất.</i> (2) - “ <i>CLGT</i> ” - <i>Cần lời giải thích?</i> (3)	Phil: I am a cool dad [...] I text: - “Ahihi” – New laughter style (1) - “QTQĐ” – That’s too much to handle - “CLGT” – Need an explanation?

These phrases are Internet slangs commonly used by American teenagers. For the first case, the SL phrase “LOL” was replaced with a similar expression that Vietnamese teenagers use – “Ahihi”. The following full form of the acronym in case (1) was superseded by the annotation of the word, whose back translation is “New laughter style”. In case (2), the SL phrase was translated into a Vietnamese expression used to express the shock or disbelief – “*Quá trời quá đất*”, whose acronym “*QTQĐ*” is also broadly used in online chats by Vietnamese teenagers. For the third case, “WTF”, an acronym expressing surprise, actually stands for “What the f**k”, but the speaker did not know that and thought it represented “Why the face”, which is funny. In the Vietnamese translation, the translator(s) successfully replaced it with “*CLGT*”, a Vietnamese equivalence that both expresses surprise and exudes the vulgar tone. “*CLGT*” represents “*Cái *** gì thế?*”, yet sometimes it is translated as “*Cần lời giải thích?*” (i.e., need an explanation?). Very briefly, the employment of transposition is effective in cases where there are no significant differences in the cultural references (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2007).

4.2.6. Lexical recreation

Despite being the least frequently applied strategy in the study, lexical recreation provides highly innovative and fascinating translations that capture the humor of the SL version. Take the following from episode 7 as an example:

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
- Alex: Your battery probably just statically defracted.	- Alex: <i>Có thể là pin của chị bị hóa phân tĩnh điện.</i>	- Alex: Your battery probably just chemically electrostaticated.
- Harley: What?	- Harley: <i>Gì cơ?</i>	- Harley: What?
- Alex: It means you can recharge it with static electricity. Just rub it on your hair.	- Alex: <i>Nghĩa là chị có thể sạc nó bằng tĩnh điện. Cứ chà nó lên tóc.</i>	- Alex: It means you can recharge it with static electricity. Just rub it on your hair.

In this scene, Alex was trying to fool her sister, Harley, to recharge her phone by rubbing it on her hair. She convinced Harley by the phrase “statically defracted”, which is a totally non-existent word but sounds like a genuine electrochemical term. The sense of the joke was captured, and an equally pseudo-academic word in the Vietnamese version was created, i.e., “*hóa phân tĩnh điện*” (chemically electrostaticated), thereby preserving the humorous effect of the original.

4.2.7. Couplet

As previously stated, two types of couplets are found in this study, namely, the literal and omission couplet and the addition and loan couplet. The combination of any two strategies is expected to help render the speaker’s intention more effectively into the target language. Nevertheless, our analysis showed such an expectation has not been met.

The use of literal translation and omission couplet in the example below (episode 5) served to condense the utterance of the character rather than highlighting the jokes for the TL audience.

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
- Gloria: Go jump in the pool.	- Gloria: <i>Đi nhảy xuống hồ bơi đi</i>	- Gloria: Go jump in the pool.
- Claire: You meant go jump in the lake?	- Claire: <i>Ý đi là hồ?</i>	- Claire: You meant the lake?
- Gloria: Go jump in the pool with the clothes on. Then I know you're sorry.	- Gloria: <i>Mặc đồ như thế này rồi nhảy xuống hồ bơi. Để đi biết con hối lỗi thật.</i>	- Gloria: Wear your clothes like this and jump in the pool. Then I know you're sorry.

In this scene, Claire is apologizing to Gloria, her stepmother, for speaking ill of her behind her back. Gloria asks her to jump into the pool to be forgiven, but Claire thinks the request should be “jump into the lake”, whose figurative meaning is “go away” because Gloria is not good at English. However, the translator did not recognize the idiomatic meaning of this expression thus omitted the phrase “go jump in” then translated “the lake” literally into “hồ”.

Consider another example from episode 1, in which the addition and loan couplet was applied:

Source text	Translated text	Back translation
- Phil: Buddy. Why do you keep getting stuck like this?	- Phil: <i>Buddy. Anh bạn, sao con cứ bị kẹt hoài thế?</i>	- Phil: Buddy. Why do you keep getting stuck like this?
- Luke: Ow.	- Luke: <i>Á.</i>	- Luke: Ow.
- Phil: There. Be free. Excalibur.	- Phil: <i>Rồi đây, tự do rồi. Thanh kiếm Excalibur.</i>	- Phil: There. Be free. Excalibur sword.

This is a dialogue between Phil and his son, Luke, as Phil was trying to help Luke get his head out of the banister. The word “Excalibur” was the humorous element, yet, it is also culture specific. According to the online encyclopedia Britannica, “Excalibur, in Arthurian

legend, is King Arthur's sword. As a boy, Arthur alone was able to draw the sword out of a stone in which it had been magically fixed". Although the translator(s) added the word "*thanh kiếm*" ("sword") after the loan word "Excalibur", the joke still did not achieve its intended impact because the cultural reference is not familiar to most Vietnamese viewers, just like Low (2011: 67) said: "in-jokes are not meant for outsiders."

5. Conclusion

Although all three types of humor are found in the first season of "Modern Family", universal jokes predominate. As the jokes are straightforward and shared across cultures, their translation, therefore, was mostly done literally, with 31 occurrences out of 100 humor units.

However, the translation of cultural and linguistic jokes was more challenging because the perception of humor differs across cultures (Low 2011), and it is extremely unlikely that the puns or wordplay in one language will be packed into the same set of meanings in another language (Cui 2012). Therefore, strategies such as literal translation or loan did not work well because it was hard for the TL viewers to recognize the translated version as humorous. Meanwhile, other strategies including compensation, transposition, or lexical recreation, although being used at a much lower frequency in this study, were proved to be more effective in either achieving a kind of dynamic equivalence or ensuring there is wordplay somewhere near the source language pun.

Despite our efforts, limitations are unavoidable. First, the research only looked at samples in the first season of the series, which might be insufficient to generalize patterns of translation strategies. Second, the selection of samples may be influenced by the researchers' subjective judgement, i.e. we may overlook samples that others find humorous and incorporate those that are not considered a joke to some people. Therefore, it is recommended that future research be conducted in a larger scope or focus on just one type of jokes for a better insight of how different translation strategies have been used and to what extent they have been successfully applied. Other research ideas might be to study viewers' perception of translation of jokes or to compare the choices of translation strategies made by professional translators and fansubbers.

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