And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the lighter side of interpreting and aims to explain why it is so important for an interpreter to be able to convey humor. While an interpreter’s main purpose is to convey the meaning of a speech, a speaker’s sense of humor and tone can have a significant impact on the message. As a result, an interpreter has to be aware of the function that the humor serves in the speech and do his or her best to reproduce it in the target language. This may require some adaptation to the target culture through a variety of techniques, ranging from finding a cultural equivalent to explaining why the joke is funny, though not all techniques are equally effective. The research paper looks at the existing research on cross-cultural humor and the challenges of interpreting different types of comedy, then makes suggestions for other possible areas of research on the subject. The existing research shows that with enough study and practice, an interpreter should be able to translate a speaker’s humor beyond simply stating: “He said something funny. Please laugh.”

Keywords: interpreting, humor, cross-cultural, bilingual, jokes, translation
Humor is an oft-overlooked side of interpretation and translation, especially for students just beginning their studies in these fields. It is a curious omission, because humor is common to every culture, every country, every age, sex, and belief in the world. Though the sense and appreciation of humor may vary widely, the existence of humor is an element that binds us all and gives us a wonderful opportunity for finding common ground. To come together on that common ground across languages, it falls to interpreters and translators to lead people there and facilitate their communication. Humor in its various forms can be a great challenge to translate, but the rewards for successfully conveying it are worth the effort.

While jokes, word play, and a funny turn of phrase may seem trivial when compared to the main message of a source text, it is the interpreter’s duty to determine how important these elements truly are to the speaker’s ideas. An interpreter does not have time to include everything in his rendition, so he must make choices: How much emphasis did the speaker put on that pun? Why did the speaker feel it necessary to make a joke at this moment? The role of the humor is crucial to the interpreter’s rendition, because it determines not only how important it is for the interpreter to translate it or find a cultural equivalent, but also the approach the interpreter should take to it and the desired audience reaction.

Much of the existing research on the subject focuses on one of two areas: the cross-cultural angle and translation tactics. The articles on cross-cultural studies examined in this paper identify several types of humor and how they may differ across cultures, nationalities, genders, and languages. The translation articles discuss strategies for translating humor found in written texts and highlight different tactics, primarily via literary comparisons of source texts and translated texts. Research dealing specifically with the challenges of interpreting humor, however, is more difficult to come by. Because of the fast-paced nature of interpreting, in
contrast to the deliberation and research that can accompany translation, it would appear that
many interpreters choose to overlook humor entirely rather than attempt to render jokes that are
linguistically or culturally difficult to translate. Nevertheless, with this review of the state of
knowledge on humor in interpreting, I aim to show that interpreters have a number of strategies
available to them if they wish to keep the audience laughing.

The Show So Far: Existing Research on Humor in Interpreting

Previous research has suggested that humor is a universal trait. One article I consulted
states that it was once thought that humor was learned and we might one day discover a group or
culture entirely devoid of it, but such as culture has never been found (Kruger, 1996). Humor is a
common coping tactic for resolving problems or airing grievances in a less aggressive way,
bringing people together through commonalities, even overcoming and poking fun at your own
weaknesses. This article states that humor falls into the general categories of aggressive, sexual,
and nonsense. Jokes may be based on an assumption of superiority (e.g. blonde jokes), but are
most effective when the target’s “ailment” is not serious enough to warrant feelings of guilt as
well. Most importantly, humor almost always springs from incongruity, the unexpected element
that surprises the audience when they thought they could predict the outcome. These general
structures, from the many studies drawn on in this article, appear to be universal across cultures.
However, it is still crucial to know your audience, such as their general ages and experiences, in
order to present these elements of humor in the right mix. I find this very relevant to what my
instructors have been saying about looking for larger elements of meaning rather than getting
stuck on words and sentence structure: if we as interpreters can identify the common elements of
humor rather than focusing on translating the details exactly right, we should have an easier time of conveying the humor that the speaker intended.

It may be most useful, however, to focus on the commonalities and differences between humor across languages and culture before we look at interpretation and translation techniques for conveying them. Of course, there are significant differences in the production and reception of humor even between cultures that share the same language, such as England, Australia, and the United States (Martin and Sullivan, 2013). In their article entitled “Sense of humor across cultures” using respondents from the three countries mentioned above, the authors found that the British generally responded much more negatively to humor than the Americans or the Australians, though the amount of humor produced in all three nationalities appeared to be about the same. In this case, the differences in language use were negligible, except for some minor vocabulary use. This shows that using the correct words is not enough for a translator or interpreter to be successful, because the transmission of humor may still be hindered by cultural sensibilities or appreciation of certain types of humor.

Categories of humor appreciation can be further subdivided into age, ethnicity, social position, and gender, which is enough to cause a translator or interpreter to despair; the variables are such that every audience will receive humor differently, and there is never one single correct way to transmit the source text’s humor. For example, the article by Martin and Sullivan points out that the men in their study self-reported higher humor production than women did regardless of culture or age (Martin and Sullivan, 2013). In psychological terms, the authors suggest that men make more attempts at humor because it is an outlet for their aggression and a method for dominating their interactions with others, especially as male participants preferred to use humor to negative effect. While this male tendency makes the translator or interpreter’s job more
challenging for transmitting a message to a wide audience, it also demonstrates the need to understand the function of humor in discourse. This research can help interpreters and translators determine the proper tone and approach that they must take when transmitting humor, though further research must be done to get a wider view of humor across gender, age, and nationality to account for the many variables that can impact humor.

The need for more research into the effect of nationality on humor in particular is apparent in light of the controversy surrounding two commercials that were aired in the UK but discontinued because of protests in the United States due to their lack of understanding of the demographics involved (Hall, 2008). While there was no linguistic translation involved, I believe it is relevant because of the cultural differences in humor that must be kept in mind and the way humor can be perceived differently by separate groups. Specifically, it deals with the reactions of minorities in different cultures. The article laments the fact that in a world where advertisements that were meant to be local can be shared on Youtube, anyone with an internet connection can become offended and raise a ruckus when they take humor out of cultural context. It is important to keep in mind, because even if the same minorities exist in different cultures (whether in terms of race, sexual orientation, etc.), those minorities might not all share the same sense of humor about their situation and place in society.

These are certainly not the only researchers to examine how humor translates across languages and cultures and the common elements that can be found across all forms of humor. Norrick points out in his article that humor is easiest to comprehend when speaker and listeners belong to the same language, cultural background, educational level, mental state, and so on, but this is rarely the case in the real world (Norrick, 2007). Instead, speakers can take advantage of cultural dissonance to create humor in surprising ways. The article is, unfortunately, a bit
unfocused in its approach, as the author jumps between “canned” jokes, conversations, literature, and electronic media, even lyrics from popular songs.

Some types of humor are common in virtually every country, whether they share a language or not, and simply need to be adapted to local stereotypes and sensibilities to fulfill the author’s intended role (Davies, 2005). These include universal stereotypes or “transposable” jokes, which can be translated directly with the subject intact and retain the humor, assuming there is no difficult play on words involved; for example, jokes about Jewish people or women. The author also identifies what she calls “switchable” jokes, where the subject can be substituted for the same meaning to fit the same societal stereotype, such as British jokes about the Irish becoming French jokes about Belgians. However, Davies identifies a third type of joke, “problematic” jokes, that arise when a joke is made about a type of people for which a stereotype does not exist in most other cultures, such as French jokes about the “slow” Swiss and European jokes about the “dirty” Turks. It is interesting to note that she compares jokes about other countries to jokes about the past, as both take place in a setting that is foreign to the listener. Unfortunately, Davies’ assertions are highly subjective, and information about sense of humor across cultures is liable to quickly become out-of-date; while this creates a problem for mapping out humor, it also reinforces her point about time period being as strong a barrier for the understanding of humor as geography.

Some studies have looked at cross-cultural understanding of humor on the comprehension rather than production side to observe the perceptions and pitfalls involved in humor across various cultures. The findings in Bell’s article show that full comprehension of the linguistic and cultural background of the speaker is not necessarily required for full understanding of cross-cultural humor, but that the most important factor to keep in mind in
humorous translation is the function of the humor, and thus how it may be perceived (Bell, 2007). The findings are drawn from studies of the interactions of two women, a native of Thailand and a native of Venezuela, their use of humor, and the reception of said humor by the other party. Full transcripts of many humorous interactions are provided, but the amount provided is often excessive for the point the author is making and the examples are not very clearly presented. Because of the small sample size, unfortunately, the article is more of a case study than a thorough investigation, so more research should be done in this area to give us a broader picture.

For another cross-cultural perspective, Erdodi and Lajiness-O’neill use a study of Americans and Hungarians to look at the perception of humor (Erdodi and Lajiness-O’neill, 2012). Unlike the others, however, this article adds in a monolingual versus bilingual element to the study of humor. The authors of this study found that Americans, possibly due to the sensitivity to racial issues in the United States, did not find ethnic humor as funny as the Hungarians did. Conversely, the Americans rated jokes about homosexuals as more funny than the Hungarians did, which may be because of the participants’ comfort levels with the subject. In all cases, bilinguals were placed somewhere in the middle in terms of joke appreciation. As the primary author who selected the jokes that were to be used in the study is a bilingual with a self-admitted stronger grasp of Hungarian, the results may be somewhat skewed by this bias. Interestingly, the findings indicate that bilinguals were more likely to appreciate humor that conformed with the language the humor was related in (for example, appreciating ethnic jokes told in Hungarian more than ones told in English). This illustrates quite clearly the link between humor and the language it is rendered in, because to speak a language is, to a certain extent, to imply the culture that is associated with it. Thus, some instances of humor may be impossible to
And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting

translate simply because of the connotations associated with the language the humor was originally told in.

The impossibility of translating humor is a sticky issue for translators, because it can be seen by some as admitting defeat. Hoffman, in his review for the New York Times focusing on the humorous side of translation, discusses the difficulties of translating humor from one language to another and some methods that can be used to overcome this problem (Hoffman, 2012). According to the author, forming a joke is an art form that relies on both creativity and luck. As a result, a translator needs to know when to “let a joke go” if there is simply no way to convey it. The author argues that, in most cases, it is better to try and find a cultural equivalent or create new puns in the target language, because nothing kills a joke more than having to over-explain it. While the article is anecdotal rather than drawn from a study, it provides some interesting ideas for how a translator or interpreter can approach humor in the source text.

Hirsch takes a closer look at translation-specific techniques for dealing with humor (Hirsch, 2011). Redundancy and repetition can be at the core of a humorous text, or they can be the bane of the author’s humorous intent in translation if used incorrectly. The author studies the translations of a series of humorous texts that have been translated from Spanish into Hebrew and draws conclusions about the frequency of tactics used by the translator to conserve the humor. Hirsch points out the high incidence of “explicitation” when dealing with ironic passages, which involves making something that was implicit in the original rendition explicit in translation for the benefit of foreign audiences. If done poorly, this can lead to excessive redundancy and bury the original humor. She makes the distinction between obligatory shifts in vocabulary (where there is no linguistic equivalent) and non-obligatory shifts (where there is a linguistic equivalent, but the cultural meaning is such that the humorous intent is more
effectively maintained with a substituted word), which need to be evaluated in both a syntactic and contextual sense. This brings up an interesting point for an interpreter or translator: even if there is an equivalent word linguistically, it may be worth it to work harder to find a word with more cultural equivalence in order to truly convey the speaker’s humor.

Norrick provides quite a few suggestions for handling instances of cross-cultural humor with a focus on cultural rather than linguistic barriers, making use of the Accommodation Theory that has been built upon by a number of researchers in Translation Studies (Norrick, 2007). This theory explores the phenomena of negative-, over- and under-accommodating when rendering a joke as a method for trying to overcome a lack of background knowledge that is required for the humor to be transmitted. A joke has been negatively accommodated when the overall effect is negative and not humorous. Over-accommodating is defined as explaining things that don’t need to be said and removing the reader or listener from the joke in the process (for example, explaining in detail what a stovepipe hat is because it is an article of clothing that is no longer worn, in spite of the fact that everyone in the United States knows what it is because of the historical portrait of Abraham Lincoln). Under-accommodating, on the other hand, is the term used when the translator or interpreter makes an effort to render the humor in the target language, but he or she is not familiar enough with the source or target culture to find an equivalent translation (or, sometimes, to even understand why it’s funny themselves).

This is in line with Popa’s work on humor translation (Popa, 2005). Popa suggests that the key to translating jokes lies in cultural concerns, not linguistic ones. While many jokes rely on a play on words, it is important to find cultural equivalents rather than simply translate the words directly. She suggests that transferring the idea of the joke into terms that make more sense in the target language’s culture (for example, turning a joke about families being like fudge
And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting

with nuts in it into a joke about a flock of sheep with a few black ones) will help avoid the culture shock that can arise when a direct translation makes no sense in the target culture and risks killing the joke. This brings us back to the idea that some jokes may not be possible to effectively translate, not necessarily for linguistic reasons, but because jokes often reflect on experiences, such as political and family-oriented ones. These types of experiences are what Popa calls “secret agreements” between the speaker and audience.

These “secret agreements” can be the greatest challenge for an interpreter, who has to be the go-between for speakers from many different countries and does not have time to do research on culture-specific references and expressions on the spot. Some researchers focus on the difficulties of tone as much as words, as interpreters rely on their voices and can convey such humor without linguistic barriers (González and Mejias, 2013). Irony and sarcasm, for example, depend heavily on tone and delivery, and are the easiest types for interpreters to miss if they are not listening for them. Indeed, some researchers find that parody, irony and sarcasm can be the most difficult forms of humor for an interpreter to render because they may rely heavily on both tone of voice and facial expression, thus offering ample opportunity for the interpreter to misinterpret the intent or for the audience to be unable to grasp it (Pavlichek and Pöchhacker, 2002). According to González and Mejias, interpreters should not even attempt to translate wordy jokes like puns, as an interpreter does not have enough time on the spur of the moment to do such jokes justice and find an intelligible equivalent in the target language. This assertion is also supported by Popa’s research, as interpreters, who don’t have much time to think of a good equivalent, run the risk of falling back on tired clichés for each roughly equivalent joke rather than trying to stay true to the originality of the speaker (Popa, 2005). Attempting to do this can hurt the audience’s trust and perception of the speaker as an orator.
In interpretation, the trust of the audience is everything. An interpreter has a duty to the speaker to recreate the speaker’s tone and general attitude in the interpretation, not just their occasional translatable one-liners, because it builds trust that the speaker is, in fact, funny. When humor is the primary focus of the speaker’s oration, as it was for one interpreter during an interpretation of a comedy show at a dinner party (Liendo, 2013), the interpreter must also ensure that the target audience does not feel excluded. A lot of humor is based on creating an in-group and an out-group, what Liendo calls “comprehenders” and “non-comprehenders,” where the humor comes from the audience being in on the “secret” with the speaker, similar to the “secret agreements” identified by Popa (Popa, 2005). For that purpose, Liendo advocates for the interpreter to explain the cultural information that is implicit in the humor when translating for her target audience; even if the listeners don’t find the humor funny and the joke is over-explained, they will most likely appreciate being included and knowing the intent. This is one way in which interpreting humor can be different than translating it, as translators have the opportunity to find methods of conveying humor without overly explaining it or using Hirsch’s similar “explicitation” technique (Hirsch, 2011).

In order to convey humor, it is crucial to understand the intended audience, the setting and register (i.e. can we use slang, abbreviations, etc.), the field, mode, and tenor that frame the humor, and the purpose of the humor (Popa, 2005). A common element throughout the research on cross-cultural humor and interpretation is the importance of understanding the function of humor. One of the most famous researchers in interpreting studies, Franz Pöchhacker, finds that most humor in these settings takes the form of humorous anecdotes, irony (often self-deprecating), and jokes (Pavlichek and Pöchhacker, 2002). The function is often for introducing a topic or speaker in a light-hearted way, easing tension, or making a difficult subject more
And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting palatable. An interpreter always needs to convey the speaker’s message and intent, including the humor. If the humor cannot be translated, of course, it is more important to get the message across than to be funny. But moments of humor can serve an important function for the speaker, from getting a poignant point across to simply spicing up a boring spot in a meeting (González and Mejias, 2013).

Interpreters have to be very aware of the speaker’s intentions – did the speaker even mean to be funny, for instance, or was it a slip of the tongue, an unintentional pun? There are no perfect, absolute truths in translation, and “sameness” or equivalence is not necessarily an indicator of success in translating humor. Instead, the interpreter must first and foremost be aware of the speaker’s aims in using humor and prioritize its importance for audience understanding (Zabalbeascoa, 2005). An interpreter will always be more effective in translating humor if she realizes the purpose that this humor serves in the source text and why the speaker felt it was necessary (Bell, 2007). In fact, it is this tendency to ignore the study of humor in interpreting that leads to interpreters having to take shortcuts, like asking the audience to laugh rather than attempting to render the humor in the target language (Pavlicek and Pöchhacker, 2002). One could argue that the primary function of the interpreter is to ensure that the source language text has the desired effect on the target language audience, but such shortcuts are certainly not the ideal solution. Ultimately, it comes down to the interpreter’s skill, and a little bit of luck, to determine whether he can convey the speaker’s humorous intentions or must instead fall back on a less desirable stopgap measure.
Suggestions for Future Research

There are some significant gaps in the available research on humor in relation to the interpretation and translation fields. Many of the studies that have been done either had a very narrow linguistic or cultural focus that makes them difficult to apply to wider interpreting practice (Pavlicek and Pöchhacker, 2002), or they tried to look at the information too broadly without taking into account variables like gender, age, ethnicity, and myriad other cultural factors (Martin and Sullivan, 2013). Other articles that touch on the subject based their findings on evidence that was virtually or even entirely anecdotal (Viaggio, 1996; Hoffman, 2012; Liendo, 2013). Another major difficulty with research into this subject is that humor itself is very subjective, so it can be challenging for the authors to remain objective in their observations. Davies, for example, sacrifices some of her credibility with her choice of terms and qualitative observations, ranging from her repeated use of the highly political term “freedom fries” to her evaluations inserted at odd intervals (e.g. “This is an exceptionally funny joke”, p. 154) (Davies, 2005).

There is, of course, a place for anecdotal accounts like those mentioned above from real interpreter, such as Viaggio’s observations during his post as a Chief Interpreter at the United Nations; there simply needs to be more empirical research into the subject as well (Viaggio, 1996). But there is certainly more cause to hear from practicing interpreters on the subject. There needs to be more follow-up to the question: “How often is humor used in speeches that you interpret simultaneously?” (Pavlicek and Pöchhacker, 2002). Zabalbeascoa takes a step in the right direction when he suggests a mapping system for different types of humor in order to help translators and interpreters do their jobs (Zabalbeascoa, 2005). His article provides a useful
And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting

review of many different types of humor and the ways interpreters have reacted to their usage, which helps create the basis for research into possible interpreter coping strategies.

It would be relevant as well to consider how monolinguals and bilinguals might perceive humor differently. An interpreter may not have the same perception as the speaker or audience, and as a result, the interpreter might even catch or create in translation cross-lingual humor that the speaker did not intend (Erdodi and Lajiness-O’neill, 2012). By definition, there must always be an important distinction between the interpreter and the audience: the audience is often monolingual and monocultural, while the interpreter is most assuredly not. This means that the interpreter may see humor in a different light than the target audience, leaving more room for miscommunication. And then there are speakers who are closer to the interpreter than the audience and sometimes deliberately make use of cross-linguistic humor. It can be especially challenging for the interpreter when the speaker’s humor relies on miscommunication between languages; for example, Norrick’s joke about an English-speaker misunderstanding a French person saying “Oui oui” or the bilingual speaker who made a joke “for the interpreters” that was virtually impossible to explain to anyone who does not speak both English and German (Norrick, 2007).

In that vein, there is plenty of room for research into how audiences react to humor in interpreter speeches. The audience’s satisfaction with an interpreted speech is typically based on their expectations going into the experience. Does the audience expect the interpreter to accurately render the speaker’s humor? Do the listeners understand the challenges and limitations inherent in the interpreting process, particularly when the interpreter is allowed very limited time and preparation? This line of questioning would benefit both from surveys and questioning the audience as well as observations from practicing interpreters, who are the first to
know whether or not a joke has fallen flat. Viaggio makes a good start on this subject with his specific examples of humor being mistranslated and suggestions of alternatives for dealing with these situations on a scale of desirability (Viaggio, 1996). Because Viaggio draws from examples he experienced, his advice on dealing with difficult speakers and their ignorance about an interpreter’s challenges is very helpful for budding interpreters. He deals in part with subjects like audience reception in mixed audience settings; while mistranslating or omitting the speaker’s humor may go unnoticed if the entire audience is relying on the interpreter, in a mixed audience, those who are not made aware of the humor by the interpreter may been excluded and publicly humiliated when the source-language audience members laugh. Interpreters need to learn more about how the audiences perceive their attempts at humor in order to learn which techniques truly work, and which can be left by the wayside. And this research needs to be wide in scope, accounting for how different cultures perceive, appreciate, and produce humor, in order to be of real use to interpreters.

The value of doing this research into humor in interpreting cannot be stressed enough. As interpreters, we cannot assume that everyone will view a joke the same way, and even seemingly easy translations must keep the cultural context in mind to avoid causing offense. Like any other skill, interpreting humor is something that can improve with practice, and several authors have recommended developing this particular talent, as humor is so universal to the human race (González and Mejias, 2013). For one technique, González and Mejias recommend interpreters study Isaac Asimov’s anthology of jokes for analyses of joke types, making it easier for interpreters to predict jokes and anticipate patterns. Some authors suggest interpreters practice telling jokes in their free time in order to become more flexible and build on their imagination and creativity, talents that are required for success as a professional comedian as well (Hoffman,
And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting 2012; Popa, 2005). This leads me to believe that an interpreter without a good sense of humor and a comedian’s sensibilities effectively cannot translate a joke.

All of this research can be helpful for teaching interpreters how to convey humor more effectively. Viaggio discusses the use of non-narrative forms of humor in simultaneous interpreting situations and identifies six challenges that affect the interpreter’s rendition: the interpreter’s language skills, the spontaneity of the source text humor, language-specific disconnects, cultural differences, the interpreter’s knowledge of these cultural differences, and the format of the humor (Viaggio, 1996). Davies suggests adding indirect information to make a joke understood by outside cultures, such as “as you know,” or even adding an extra character who is telling the joke as a foreigner. It shares hidden assumptions with the listeners without over-explaining and thus ruining the joke, allowing the interpreter to subtly enhance the telling to a foreign audience (Davies, 2005). Surprisingly, some authors even claim that an interpreter is permitted to ask the audience to laugh in order to build rapport with the speaker, even if the joke cannot be translated, though this is obviously to be used as a last resort (González and Mejias, 2013). There is an often-repeated story of an interpreter doing just that to President Jimmy Carter:

Carter was perplexed to find his opening anecdote in a speech to a college in Japan greeted with uproarious laughter. When he asked why the joke had gotten such an extraordinary response, he received this reply from his Japanese interpreter: “I told the audience, ‘President Carter told a funny story; everyone must laugh.’” (Hoffman, 2012)

This research can help interpreters in a practical way, to understand how to deal with humor of all types, especially delicate types of jokes, for example, “victim” jokes and humor that
relies on breaking taboos, both of which are heavily reliant on cultural perceptions. Interpreters can build on Zabalbeascoa’s speech mapping to help them think about rewording humor to fit the target culture, a similar task to all of the restructuring that interpreters are asked to do on a daily basis (Zabalbeascoa, 2005).

Conclusion

While some would say that interpreting humor is secondary to conveying the main message, I believe is it a crucial skill for successful interpreters to develop. Interpreters have to work not only on knowledge of humor, creativity, and flexibility, but also on tone and even body language. The voice and tone that the interpreter use are just as important as conveying the individual jokes and one-liners, because that is the lasting impression that an audience will retain of the speaker. Speakers have to trust their interpreters to faithfully represent them to people from other languages and cultures. While the speakers typically cannot understand the words their interpreters say, they can certainly witness the effect. It is painfully obvious to a speaker when a joke falls flat, and difficult as it may be both linguistically and culturally to convey the speaker’s humor, that communication is always the interpreter’s responsibility.

Interpreters always try to make their rendition sound as idiomatic as possible, which means not tying themselves down to the words and structure of the original. When an interpreter has the creativity and imagination to truly understand the meaning and function of humor beyond the words, it becomes much easier to convey that feeling to the audience. For example, I once interpreted a speech about the history of the Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage route that stretches across Europe and ends in Spain. The speaker said a farewell at the end and turned it
And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting

into a little joke, “Buen camino”. Without thinking, I interpreted it as “happy trails.” It may not have been a pun like the original, but it did succeed in conveying both the “have a good trip” meaning and the friendly feeling as well, thus staying true to the speaker’s intention.

The existing research has shown the importance role that humor plays in our lives, from breaking the ice, to building relationships, to lightening up a slow-paced speech. Interpreters must determine the speaker’s purpose in using humor and how best to approach the interpretation while keeping in mind the context, the speaker’s intentions, and the demographics of the intended audience. Even after all that, an interpreter needs to be aware that certain instances of humor, whether for linguistic or cultural reasons, may be impossible to translate after all. In cases such as these, the interpreter must stay calm and attempt to explain this to the audience; depending on the context, it may even be possible for the interpreter to make a joke out of the untranslatable nature of the joke so that the speaker still sees a reaction to his joke and the audience does not feel left out. It takes a lot of courage for an interpreter to attempt to transmit a joke knowing that it may fall flat, earning dead silence from the audience and embarrassment for both speaker and interpreter.

As for the research specific to translation and interpreting studies, much of it is anecdotal in nature and focuses more on the challenges of translation rather than interpretation. The articles examined in this paper suggest methods such as adding in cultural markers that would be unfamiliar to the target audience, looking for cultural equivalents to the jokes, or simply explaining to the audience why the speaker thought the joke was funny. Because interpreters do not have an abundance of time in which to reformulate jokes, it is important for interpreters to practice conveying humor, familiarize themselves with the clichés, and work on maintaining the creativity and flexibility employed by professional comedians. While successfully interpreting a
And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting

joke will always be a challenge, no matter how experienced the interpreter becomes, it is an interpreter’s duty to help build the same sort of rapport between speaker and audience that would exist if both parties were speaking the same language. And humor, a common trait that binds all of humanity, is profoundly important for reaching that goal.

In light of the topic, it seems appropriate to end with a joke: Now that I am a married woman, at least I’ll never be called a Miss Interpreter.
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And Now For Something Completely Different: Why Humor Matters in Interpreting


