Translation of Humor and Culture: Examples from The Big Bang Theory

Traducción del humor y cultura: ejemplos de The Big Bang Theory

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Abstract

Translation of humor and cultural references are the main challenges that linguists focused on audiovisual translation must overcome. The objective is to translate the source material into something that the audience will understand. However, not all comical situations and expressions or cultural allusions are translatable literally or have an equivalent in the target language. To maintain the same level of impact and comic relief, these translation professionals make important decisions that range from omission to a complete transformation of each joke and reference. This paper contains an analysis of the translations into Spanish of four heavily charged instances of comedy and cultural references of the television series The Big Bang Theory. In conclusion, this study underscores the intricate strategies and choices made by translators to maintain the humor and cultural nuances of the content in different linguistic contexts.

Keywords: translations, audio-visual communication, wit and humor, television series

Resumen

La traducción del humor y referencias culturales es uno de los principales retos que los lingüistas centrados en la traducción audiovisual deben superar. El objetivo es producir una traducción del material fuente que la audiencia entienda. No todas las situaciones cómicas, expresiones o alusiones culturales tienen equivalencia o sentido literal cuando se traducen. Para mantener el mismo nivel de impacto y comicidad, estos profesionales deben tomar decisiones importantes que van desde omitir el contenido hasta transformar por completo cada chiste o referencia. Este artículo contiene un análisis de las traducciones al español de cuatro situaciones cargadas de comedia y referencias culturales de la serie de televisión The Big Bang Theory. En conclusión, este estudio subraya las complejas estrategias y elecciones que toman los traductores para mantener el humor y los matices culturales del contenido en distintos contextos lingüísticos.

Palabras clave: traducciones, comunicación audiovisual, humorismo, series televisivas

Introduction

The focus of this paper is to analyze how the translators of the dubbed and subtitled versions of The Big Bang Theory transferred four humorous acts into Spanish (Spain variant). The foundations of the review are set on the audiovisual theory published by prominent scholars in the field such as Patrick Zabalbeascoa and his classification of jokes and binary solutions, and the extralinguistic cultural reference transfer model (ECR) by Jan Pedersen. Additionally, this study contributes to the field of audiovisual translation by providing a nuanced understanding of how humor is translated in contemporary, popular media. Furthermore, by focusing on a TV show known for a unique and complex sense of humor, this examination helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and elucidates the challenges and strategies employed by translators in the evolving landscape of recent global entertainment. To reach these aims, this paper includes a summary of the aforementioned classifications, a brief description of the examined television program, and the analysis of four chosen cases of humor: three primarily language-dependent jokes mixed with visual and cultural particles and one entirely cultural. As a result of the study of the four examples, the translation evidenced an unsuccessful transmission of the humorous effect in two of them, kept the same joke in one, and changed the type of joke in another. The analysis structures the cases by starting with a brief description of the circumstances followed by the corresponding examination of the dubbed and subtitled versions. Lastly, this article incorporates a classification of each of the situations according to the taxonomy and binary formula designed by Zabalbeascoa to determine the type of joke and strategy the translators may have applied to transfer humor. In addition, this paper provides an

analysis based on the model of cultural reference translation by Pedersen to demonstrate how the translators rendered a cultural reference in one of the jokes that strongly relied on culture to convey humor. To summarize this introduction, an analysis of humor in the selected examples from The Big Bang Theory illustrates how a translation may transfer a mixture of cultural, visual, and language-dependent comical situations that result in the same type of joke, same joke, or even lose the intended effect.

Theoretical Framework

The examination presented in this paper is based on the work of authors in the field of audiovisual translation theory such as Patrick Zabalbeascoa and Jan Pedersen. Zabalbeascoa is a referent in the humor translation topic. Therefore, this study bases the analysis on the taxonomies found in two of his works. In "Translating Jokes for Dubbed Television Situation Comedies," Zabalbeascoa (1996) indicates that translators may encounter seven types of jokes:

1. International joke: does not depend on culture or language and travels anywhere. These jokes lose the least amount of their humor when translated. Therefore, funny stories based on absurd situations can maintain their humorousness. For example:

   • "Two muffins are sitting in an oven. One turns to the other and says, 'Wow! It's hot in here!' and the other responds, 'Ahh! A talking muffin!'" (French, 2018).

This joke does not involve cultural or language-specific wordplay and the idea of talking objects is universally humorous because of their nonsensical nature.

2. Binational joke: has referents on a specific language pair, meaning that a joke would be particularly funny or understandable to speakers of two specific languages or cultures but might not translate as effectively to others. Zabalbeascoa exemplifies with this joke:

   • English (source text, from now on ST): "A Minister with two ideas. I can't remember when we last had one of those."
   • Catalan (target text, from now on TT): "Un Ministre amb dues idees. No recordo qui va ser l'ultim que vam tenir."
   • Interlinear translation (from now on gloss): "A Minister with two ideas. I can't remember the last one we had" (Zabalbeascoa,1996, p. 252).

In this example, the joke plays on the stereotype that ministers (or politicians in general) typically do not have many original ideas. The Catalan translation maintains the essence of this joke by communicating the same surprise. The variation is minimal, but the core humorous element remains intact. The humor of this joke does not rely on linguistic wordplay but rather on a shared cultural perception. Since both cultures can understand and potentially agree with this view, the joke can be considered binational.

3. National, cultural, and institutional jokes: "need to adapt national, cultural or institutional references of the original to retain the humorous effect for the foreign audience" (1996, p. 252). When these jokes are presented to foreign audiences, the original references may need to be adapted to maintain their humorous effect. For example:

   · Question (ST): Why do British people never play hide and seek?
   · Answer (ST): Because good luck hiding when the kettle is on!

   This joke plays on the stereotypical British love for tea. The sound of a kettle would reveal the hiding spot. When adapting this joke for an American public, an alternative could be:

   · Question (TT): Why can't Americans play hide and seek?
   · Answer (TT): Because good luck hiding when someone yells: "The Hot Pockets are ready!"

   Hot Pockets, a popular microwave snack in the United States, serves as a cultural reference that many Americans can identify with, as their allure would reveal their hiding spot to get a Hot Pocket. This brand reference aims to provide a humorous and relatable cue that is culturally significant and widely recognized in America, which makes the joke more effective for that audience.

4. National sense of humor jokes (endemic jokes): refer to the style of joking that is preferred in a national or cultural group. According to Zabalbeascoa, "some communities like to make fun of themselves, whereas others do not and prefer to laugh at somebody else's expense . . . [and] depend on culture, religion or historical and political connections with neighbouring nations" (1996, p. 252). Therefore, these jokes rely on local practices and the particular sense of humor of the source. This theory can be applied to the following self-deprecating joke adaptation for a Canadian audience:

   · Question (ST): Why don't Brits ever seem surprised?
   · Answer (ST): Because they know it is going to rain!
   · Question (TT): Why aren't Canadians ever surprised?
   · Answer (TT): Because they expect snow even in the summer!

   This adaptation preserves the self-deprecating humor by referencing the stereotype of cold unpredictable weather in Canada. Adapting these jokes for a different audience requires keeping the target text relatable and understandable to the new audience. This often involves substituting culturally specific references with those that are more familiar to the target audience.

5. Language-dependent jokes: these are conditioned by the "features of natural language" (1996, p. 253) that sometimes are untranslatable and require to be created anew or adapted to the target. An instance of a single word that refers to two or more words in the sentence, with different meanings in each context (zeugma) is present in the following joke:

- English (ST): He stole my heart and my wallet.
- Spanish (TT): Él me robó el corazón y la cartera.
- Interlinear translation: He stole my heart and wallet.

The term "stole" applies to both "heart" and "wallet" but in different senses: metaphorically for "heart" (falling in love) and literally for "wallet" (taking possession of). Translation of this example is straightforward because both meanings can still be conveyed with a literal translation. Notwithstanding, sometimes these wordplays or puns will not have a direct translation and translators will have to recreate the joke in the context of the target language to preserve humor.

6. Visual jokes: Zabalbeascoa separates this type of joke into purely visual and linguistic jokes disguised as visual jokes. On one hand, humor derived from visual elements is based on what is seen on screen, regardless of language. They are understandable because they do not rely on language-specific wordplay or cultural references. For example, in the classic slipping on a banana peel slapstick comedy trope, humor stems from an action and not language or a cultural reference. Therefore, these jokes depend on visual cues for humor. On the other hand, language-dependent visual jokes rely on visual representations of language-based jokes or wordplay, and their understanding are language-specific. For instance, the picture of an eye, followed by a picture of a can, then a picture of a bee, and finally a picture of a leaf

forming the words "I can believe." This style of visual joke is often found in Internet memes where images are used to represent words or phrases, and translation is quite difficult or unattainable.

7. Complex jokes: combine a number of the above-mentioned types. For example:

- Question (ST): Why did Hamlet take so long to make decisions?
- Answer (ST): Because he couldn't decide whether "to be or not to be."
- Question (TT): ¿Por qué Hamlet tardó tanto en tomar decisiones?
- Answer (TT): Porque no podía decidir si "ser o no ser".
- Question (gloss): Why did Hamlet take so long to make decisions?
- Answer (gloss): Because he couldn't decide whether "to be or not to be."

This joke combines language play and a cultural reference by playing with the famous line "to be or not to be" from Hamlet.

This taxonomy formulated by Zabalbeascoa provides a foundational understanding of jokes and their translation. His classification outlines seven distinct types of jokes and provides a comprehensive lens through which humor can be analyzed in translation. The given examples illustrate the practical applications and implications of each joke type and highlight the dynamic connections between language, culture, and humor.

Zabalbeascoa followed-up on the topic of translation of jokes in "Humor and translation — an interdiscipline

(2005), where he introduces a binary formula composed of five possible solutions for the translation of humor (see figure 1):

1. The first solution includes all potential solutions that may be considered as the same joke (2005, p. 199). The joke remains essentially the same in the target language, as in the "He stole my heart and my wallet" joke used as an example above.

2. The second solution level is an "instance of the 'same type' of joke although not essentially the same" (p. 199). This means that a translated joke is not the same but stays in the same joke category. Take for example the following play on words found in *Explain the Joke*, that when translated is still a play on words in the target language:

   - English (ST): Why don't skeletons fight each other?
   - Answer (ST): They don't have the guts! (stfleming, 2013)
   - Spanish (TT): ¿Por qué los esqueletos no pelean entre sí?
   - Answer (TT): ¡Porque no tienen el estómago para hacerlo!
   - Question (gloss): ¿Why don't skeletons fight each other?
   - Answer (gloss): Because they don't have the stomach for it!

Though not a direct translation, the TT preserves the play on words, making it a joke of the same type.

3. The third category is a transference of the original joke into any joke, meaning that the translation

is still a joke, but not a direct translation. For example:

   - English (ST): Why don't some fish play piano?
   - Answer (ST): Because you can't tuna fish! (Comedy Central UK, 2022, 2:02).
   - Spanish (TT): ¿Por qué los peces no usan Facebook?
   - Answer (TT): Porque odian las redes (Hardy, 2015).
   - Question (gloss): Why don't fish use Facebook?
   - Answer (gloss): Because they hate nets.

When this joke is translated into Spanish, a new wordplay is created with the double meaning of "redes" (nets and social networks). In this level, the specific words in the joke change, but a reimagined version that would be funny to the target audience is provided.

4. The fourth technique is compensation, in which the translator resorts to using another device or expression to communicate humor, such as hyperbole, simile, or a straightforward explanation. In this manner, understanding is facilitated at the expense of a certain level of humor.

5. The last solution is maiming: the translation of a joke that results in "no special effect [or that is] straightforward, plain, [and] unfunny . . ." (2005, p. 199). In these cases, the joke is completely lost, and the focus is on conveying information at the expense of the humorous intent. As a consequence, the translation is devoid of humor.

Figure 1
Binary Formula by Zabalbeascoa (2005, p. 200)
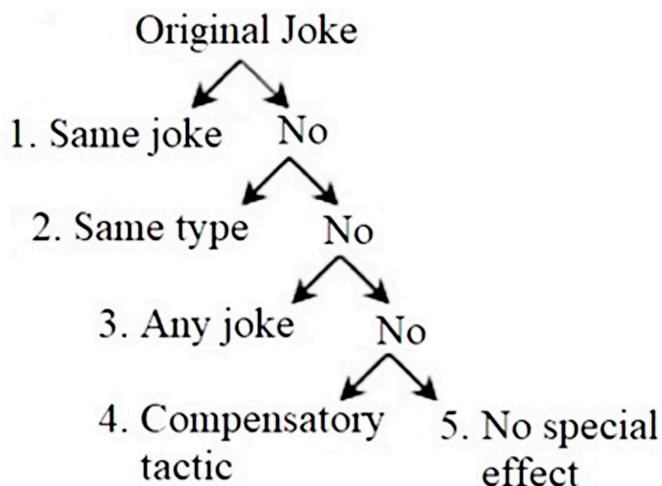
The theory of binary solutions offers a systematic approach for translators navigating the difficult task of translating humor. Moreover, this theory provides strategies ranging from maintaining the original joke to opting for a straightforward, non-humorous translation.

This paper also utilizes the taxonomy of translation strategies presented by Jan Pedersen in the 2011 book *Subtitling Norms for Television* for the analysis of one of the humorous acts that is fundamentally based on culture. Pedersen explains that "cultural references are one of the most important translation problems translators deal with" (p. 43). The main function of translators is to become bridges between two cultures and "what is funny in one culture may not be amusing in another" (Jackson, 2012) if transferred directly. In this regard, subtitlers and dubbers of audiovisual material must solve problems that derive from the cultural expressions of the source and the appropriate rendition into the target culture (Pedersen, 2011, p. 37). Pedersen also explains that these problems manifest themselves in the form of "references to places, people, institutions, customs, [and] food" (2011, p. 44) that translators may solve with an official equivalent. However, in the absence of an equal reference, subtitlers may focus on the source and retain the reference without changes (sometimes by using italics to mark the word on the subtitles), specify the reference (to add more information), and directly translate the reference (p. 76). The translator may also focus on a target-oriented solution and generalize (with the help of a superordinate term or a

restatement of meaning in the form of a paraphrase), substitute the cultural reference, or omit the allusion (p. 76). The following examples further illustrate the strategies presented by Pedersen:

Source-oriented:

- Retention: If a character in an English show mentions "Thanksgiving," a holiday primarily celebrated in the United States, the term can be retained in the translation without any alteration.
- Specification: For a term such as "football," which in American English refers to a sport played with an oval ball, translators might specify with the addition "American football" for audiences where "football" means soccer.
- Direct translation: If a show makes a reference to "the White House," translators may decide to maintain the reference with a direct translation.

Target-oriented:

- Generalization: If a character talks about eating "tacos," the translator might opt for a superordinate term such as "Mexican food" for audiences unfamiliar with tacos.
- Substitution: When mentioning a reality TV show from the United Kingdom, a translator might use a popular reality show in the target culture as a substitute.
- Omission: If a joke or reference is deeply rooted in English culture and lacks an equivalent understanding in the target culture, translators may decide to omit the reference in the target text.

This theory outlined by Pedersen provides a structured approach to translating cultural references, which is important in maintaining the integrity and humor of the original text. His source-oriented strategies, including retention, specification, and direct translation, aim to stay close to the original material. On the contrary, target-oriented strategies, such as generalization, substitution, and omission, adapt the text to resonate with the cultural background of the target audience.

To summarize, Zabalbeascoa and Pedersen provide tools for the translation of jokes and cultural references in various audiovisual contexts, such as TV shows and movies. Zabalbeascoa gives a detailed breakdown of different joke types and introduces a binary branching model. On the other hand, Pedersen suggests specific ways to handle cultural references.

These theories are applied in the following assessment of jokes from The Big Bang Theory. The humor of the show relies on understanding American culture; therefore, the theory presented by Pedersen becomes useful for the analysis because the translation can be evaluated with the ECR strategies. Moreover, the classification provided by Zabalbeascoa helps identify the nature of the jokes and the binary model outlines how humor was handled for a Spanish-speaking audience. Lastly, the analysis of these jokes also contributes to the broader discourse on humor studies, translation theory, and cross-cultural communication.

Methodology

The audiovisual content that the author of this paper selected for analysis is an American situational comedy called The Big Bang Theory that aired from 2007 to 2019. This television program followed how the geeky, nerdy, introverted, and eccentric lives of the characters named Sheldon, Leonard, Howard, and Raj intertwine with their counterparts and love interests such as Penny, Amy, Bernadette, and clash against other smaller characters. Created by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady and distributed by Warner Bros. Television, The Big Bang Theory premiered a total of 229 episodes over twelve seasons (IMDb.com). This review started by choosing episodes 9 *The Citation Negation* and 10 *The VCR Illumination* from the last season of the show. The author watched each episode for the first time on the Netflix streaming platform in the original English language with a focus on identifying the abundant humorous acts. After that step, the author watched the two episodes again and transcribed the first round of jokes for analysis (a total of ten jokes were selected, see chart in Appendix). For the next step, the author watched those episodes again, but in the Spanish dubbed translation followed by the English version with Spanish subtitles on. Also, the Spanish translations of the jokes were charted in this stage.

Next, each example was classified according to audiovisual theory and split into the categories of jokes and binary formula solutions by Zabalbeascoa and the ECR strategy by Pedersen, where pertinent. Nevertheless, due to space constraints, the author had to choose a final round of four humorous acts for the elaboration of the analysis: one language-dependent and cultural joke (complex), another just language-dependent, the third is a funny moment based on an American cultural referent, and a language-dependent joke combined with visual elements (complex). The last step was to categorize if the translators transferred these jokes either into the same type of joke, the same joke, or a lost joke.

Results and Discussion

The following analysis of each selected joke is carried out using the criteria and theories outlined by Zabalbeascoa and Pedersen as a basis for evaluation. Tables are included to clearly display the original, dubbed and subtitled versions, and interlinear translations (gloss) of each joke, which serve as a simple comparison of the content being analyzed. Figures are also included in the form of screenshots taken directly from the scene of each joke for better understanding of the context.

Table 1
Season 12, episode 9: The Citation Negation (00:02-00:20)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Amy	Sheldon, do you want to put the tables after each section or in the appendix at the end?	Sheldon, ¿quieres poner las tablas después de cada sección o en un apéndice al final?	Sheldon, do you want to put the tables after each section or in an appendix at the end?	¿Ponemos las tablas después de cada sección, o en un apéndice al final?	Do we put the tables after each section, or in an appendix at the end?
Sheldon	You know what? We wrote this paper together. I think we should decide together that they go in an appendix at the end.	¿Sabes qué? Hemos hecho este trabajo juntos, creo que deberíamos decidir juntos que van en un apéndice al final.	You know what? We've done this work together, I think we should decide together that they go in an appendix at the end.	Escribimos este trabajo juntos y deberíamos decidir juntos que irán en un apéndice al final.	We wrote this paper together and we should decide together that they will go in an appendix at the end.
Amy	How about that? There is an "I" in "team."	Mira por dónde esto no es trabajo en equipo.	Look at how this is not teamwork.	¿Qué me dices? Esto sí es un equipo.	What do you think? Now this is a team.

Sheldon (a main character of the show), with his sense of superiority, initiates the humorous act by saying that whatever he says is final without agreeing with or consulting Amy (another main character and his wife). For this reason, she sarcastically responds with a different use of the phrase "there is no 'I' in team" to highlight his wrongdoing, which is a common phrase in the English language used, with a bit of wordplay, to encourage teamwork. The pronoun "I" represents the individuality that must be avoided for teamwork to be successful. To prove that, the word "team" does not contain the letter 'i' that symbolizes the self (Know Your Phrase, 2019). In this manner, Amy lets Sheldon know that he is acting individually and actively ignoring her. The table above delineates the discrepancies between the original, dubbed, and subtitled versions.

Figure 2
The facial expression of Amy depicting a sarcastic utterance.

Note. Image from "The Citation Negation" episode of The Big Bang Theory television series. Copyright © 2018 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Image used for illustrative purposes only.

According to the types of jokes and their potential solutions by Zabalbeascoa (1996, pp. 251-254), this instance is mainly a language-dependent joke with a spoonful of culture. This first example possibly proved a challenge for the translators because both the dubbed and subtitled versions could not keep up with the weight of the cultural and linguistic connotations. The inherent wordplay in "there is an 'I' in team," even with the small switch that Amy makes to the original idiom, represents a cultural sense of teamwork. At the same time, the joke depends on language due to the double meaning encased in the letter "i." Consequently, the use of this idiom is humorous because the English-speaking audience should be familiar with the phrase. For the translator, however, this joke is difficult not only because of the way language is used, but also because a similar phrase in the target language is needed to keep the same level of humor as the original. The joke translates in Spanish to *no hay i en equipo*, which does not make sense; therefore, the translators cannot have a literal approach and transfer the idiom as the same joke or the same type. In this case, both Spanish transfer modes followed an approach that had to sacrifice the joke. From this point of view and instead of a literal transfer, the translation could have found an equivalent such as *equipyo* (DLyons, 2011): *Me gusta el trabajo en equipyo*.

Furthermore, the translation could have relied on what Zabalbeascoa calls a compensatory tactic: "[this solution] provides that the translation may not render the joke as a joke, but may compensate for this by resorting to some other device" (2005, p. 199), which in this situation, clearly is sarcasm. In line with the binary strategies for joke translation presented by Zabalbeascoa (2005, p. 200), the transfer could have been compensated with the hope that the audience would catch the sarcasm. Yet, the dubbed version did not convey this feature, evidencing an oversight of the paralinguistic code, which is an important factor to consider when compensating for the lack of an equivalent phrase (notice the facial expressions of Amy: raised eyebrows and grin in figure 2 as she utters the punchline to Sheldon). Sarcasm is imperceptible when listening to the dubbed version, which demonstrates that these non-verbal features were overlooked. In other words, the dubbing could have at least resorted to not losing the sarcastic tone of the phrase, but this was lost because no attention was paid to the paralinguistic code present in the act. Sarcasm, as a manner of humor, was not conveyed in the dubbed version, and the humor derived from the cultural referent of the joke was lost.

Table 2
Season 12, episode 9: The Citation Negation (00:30-00:38)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Sheldon	It's got my bottomless intellectual curiosity and your petulant refusal to spell "gray" with an "a" like an American.	Tiene mi ilimitada curiosidad intelectual y tu petulante negativa a escribir "solo" sin tilde, como quieren hacer ahora.	It has my unlimited intellectual curiosity and your petulant refusal to write "solo" without a diacritic, as they want to do now.	Mi infinita curiosidad intelectual y tu petulante negación a escribir "guion" sin tilde.	My infinite intellectual curiosity and your petulant refusal to write "script" without diacritic.

In the next joke, Sheldon refers to the work that he and Amy put toward writing a successful paper. To understand this joke, the viewer must be aware of the spelling differences between American and British English, and in this case, the spelling of the word "gray." In the American dialect, the spelling is "gray" whereas in the United Kingdom is "grey." Therefore, the joke lies in the fact that Amy, being an American, does not spell a word following the American convention.

The model of analysis by Zabalbeascoa indicates that this humorous act depends on language; moreover, the translation was faithful to the original spirit of the joke and transferred the meaning through an equivalency. Furthermore, the joke depends on a specific feature of language (Zabalbeascoa, 1996, p. 253): a difference between dialects. Nonetheless, in the dubbed and subtitled translations, the focus shifted from a dialect difference to a grammatical rule that has caused some controversies in the Spanish language: accent, more specifically, the proper use of the diacritical mark of the words *guion* and *solo*. In the last ten years, authorities such as the Royal Spanish Academy and the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language have had to ratify the proper and advised use of the accent of these words through official publications: *Ortografía de la Lengua Española* from 2010 (FundéuRae, 2014), *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* (Real Academia Española, 2005), and *Español al día* (Real Academia Española, n.d.). Additionally, Spanish language academies strive for grammatical unity regardless of the country (Real Academia Española, 2005); therefore, to avoid inconsistency, the academies ruled to avoid the accent mark. Some writers did not welcome the change due to being accustomed to *sólo* and *guión* (Martín et al., 2014). Even though the translations are different because they use distinct words, both transfers use the same method: an equivalent. In Spanish, the joke remained the same type of joke from the same category because the result is still language-dependent.

Table 3
Season 12, episode 10: The VCR Illumination (04:38-04:53)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Bernadette	What's on the tape?	¿Qué hay en esa cinta?	What's on that tape?	¿Qué hay en la cinta?	What's on wthe tape?
Howard	Not sure. I used to record a lot of *Jeopardy!* for my mom, but if I push play and you see some naked people…	No estoy seguro. Le grababa muchos concursos a mi madre, pero si le doy al play y ves gente desnuda…	I'm not sure. I used to tape a lot of contests for my mom, but if I push play and you see naked people…	No lo sé. Solía grabar *Jeopardy!* para mi madre. Pero si le doy al play, y ves gente desnuda…	I don't know. I used to record *Jeopardy!* for my mother. But if I push play, and you see naked people…
Bernadette	Got it. What is porn?	Entendido. ¿Qué es el porno?	Got it. What is porn?	Lo pillo. ¿Qué es el porno?	I get it. What is porn?

Howard	Uh, we were looking for "vintage '80s erotica," but I'll accept it.	La respuesta correcta es erotismo vintage de los años ochenta.	The correct answer is vintage eroticism from the eighties.	La respuesta correcta era "erótica *vintage* de los 80", pero lo aceptaremos.	The correct answer was "vintage '80s erotica," but we'll take it.

To briefly describe the situation, Bernadette (a main character and the wife of Howard) finds her husband playing a video on an old videocassette recorder. She then asks him what the tape is about, and Howard says that he is not sure, but that he used to record the popular American television show Jeopardy! He then jokingly tells her that the tape may have pornographic material; subsequently, she starts pretending she is playing Jeopardy!, where contestants must respond with a question, to which Howard follows along and pretends to be the host of the game. The object of the joke is the connection the viewer can make between Jeopardy! and seeing the characters have fun by pretending to be in the popular show. The table above details discrepancies among the original, dubbed, and subtitled versions, notably in how certain terms or cultural references, such as 'Jeopardy!', are approached and translated, which are further examined below.

Figure 3
Marked retention of cultural referent Jeopardy!

Note. Image from "The VCR Illumination" episode of The Big Bang Theory television series. Copyright © 2018 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Image used for illustrative purposes only.

This humorous act contains an extralinguistic cultural reference (ECR) and the strategy used for the transfer was target-oriented in the dubbed version but source-oriented in the subtitled counterpart; in addition, the joke resulted in an almost literal translation on both ends. In terms of audiovisual translation theory, Jeopardy! refers to an intellectual work from the United States of America that must be exchanged by a "referent within the encyclopaedic knowledge of the audience" (Pedersen, 2011, p. 43). According to the ECR transfer strategies, the cultural transfer in the dubbed rendition was target-oriented because of the generalization of Jeopardy! to the superordinate term *Concursos* whereas the subtitles were more focused on the source on account of the complete retention of the foreign word marked by italics (see figure 3). Lastly, the dubbed interpretation still helps the audience relate to and make direct associations between the *What is porn?* question and the acting-like-a-contest situation (understanding why the characters imitate a game show). Concerning the binary formula of humor transfer solutions proposed by Zabalbeascoa, the dubbed performance changed the joke but conserved the cultural category, and the subtitled version kept the joke the same but alienated the fragment of viewers who do not know what Jeopardy! is.

Table 4
Season 12, episode 10: The VCR Illumination (11:30-12:09)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Subtitled Version
Howard	I've got magic to do, just for you. I've got miracle plays to play. I've got parts to perform, hearts to warm. Kings and things to take by storm as we go along our way.	[Not dubbed into Spanish]	[Not subtitled into Spanish]

The last example is also from episode ten when Bernadette attempts to help Howard fulfill his childhood dream of entering the prestigious Magic Castle. To accomplish this, Howard rehearses his audition in front of Bernadette and Raj (his best friend). The action starts with a choreography to the tune of "Magic to Do" from the Broadway musical Pippin. The comedy of the act lies not only in seeing Howard dancing and pantomiming ridiculously but also in listening to him awfully sing the lyrics describing the magic act that he is about to perform. To entertain even more, he comically throws confetti at Raj in the face. The act is essentially visual, but also language-dependent because of the intertext created between the song and the actions

of Howard. As Zabalbeascoa points out, this instance is "humor derived solely from what one sees on the screen and the kind of joke that may seem entirely visual but is really the visually coded version of a linguistic joke" (1996, p. 253). In this case, the verbal (singing) and the non-verbal (physical comedy) elements fuse to complete the humorous act.

Nevertheless, this scene was neither subtitled nor dubbed into Spanish and not even referenced in the form of an insert to communicate the name of the song and provide context. Regardless of the reasons why this part was not transferred, from the point of view of the target audience, a substantial part of the joke was lost (the idea behind the song). In this regard, humor in this example merely focuses on the gestures and silly attempts at dancing and singing of Howard which further increase the reliance on what is seen and not on what is heard or read to understand humor. In this manner, the Spanish rendition dismissed the linguistic code and entrusted all the humor to the visuals.

Conclusions

An analysis of the humor presented in the four examined cases from The Big Bang Theory reveals that the translation of comedy subjected to linguistic, visual, and cultural factors may have different outcomes. On one hand, what happened to the first joke serves as an example of overlooking the non-verbal cues called paralinguistic codes. The dubbing studio could have saved the joke by turning up the level of sarcasm coming from the voice actor of Amy. For the subtitled version, the expression of sarcasm was more difficult to convey, and the energy of the joke was lost. On the other hand, the second instance illustrates how to appropriately use an equivalent. The terms *solo* and *guion* work greatly well at transporting the joke from one language to the other without losing meaning. The third situation based on the American contest Jeopardy! demonstrates how an extralinguistic cultural referent may be transferred with a focus on the target language such as changing the term for a widely recognized referent (*concursos*), or with a focus on the source by keeping the referent unchanged as in the subtitles. Finally, the fourth funny moment, the singing and dancing by Howard, was entirely omitted in both renditions of the show in Spanish. Therefore, the opportunity to carry a hilarious situation was wasted and hence lost humorous force. To conclude, leaving the joke the same does not guarantee that the comical strength will also be the same. However, by changing and transforming the joke with different methods, an audiovisual translation can still convey the same amount of humor originally meant, or still bring a funny joke to the target audience, but sometimes packing a less powerful punch.

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Appendix

Table A1
Type: Complex [language and cultural] - - - Dubbed: lost joke / Subtitled: lost joke.
Episode 9: The Citation Negation (00:02-00:20)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Amy	Sheldon, do you want to put the tables after each section or in the appendix at the end?	Sheldon, ¿quieres poner las tablas después de cada sección o en un apéndice al final?	Sheldon, do you want to put the tables after each section or in an appendix at the end?	¿Ponemos las tablas después de cada sección, o en un apéndice al final?	Do we put the tables after each section, or in an appendix at the end?
Sheldon	You know what? We wrote this paper together. I think we should decide together that they go in an appendix at the end.	¿Sabes qué? Hemos hecho este trabajo juntos, creo que deberíamos decidir juntos que van en un apéndice al final.	You know what? We've done this work together, I think we should decide together that they go in an appendix at the end.	Escribimos este trabajo juntos y deberíamos decidir juntos que irán en un apéndice al final.	We wrote this paper together and we should decide together that they will go in an appendix at the end.
Amy	How about that? There is an "I" in "team."	Mira por dónde esto no es trabajo en equipo.	Look at how this is not teamwork.	¿Qué me dices? Esto sí es un equipo.	What do you think? Now this is a team.

Table A2
Type: Language-dependent - - - Dubbed: same type / Subtitled: same type.
Episode 9: The Citation Negation (00:29-00:38)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Sheldon	It's got my bottomless intellectual curiosity and your petulant refusal to spell "gray" with an "a" like an American.	Tiene mi ilimitada curiosidad intelectual y tu petulante negativa a escribir "solo" sin tilde, como quieren hacer ahora.	It has my boundless intellectual curiosity and your petulant refusal to write "solo" without a tilde, as they want to do now.	Mi infinita curiosidad intelectual y tu petulante negación a escribir "guion" sin tilde.	My infinite intellectual curiosity and your petulant refusal to write "script" without tilde.

Table A3
Type: Complex [visual and language-dependent] - - Dubbed: same joke / Subtitled: same joke.
Episode 9: The Citation Negation (03:15-03:30)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Sheldon	Congratulations, Leonard, you passed my secret loyalty test. The truth is, I was never having an affair with the cafeteria lady. There's only one woman who gets to touch my no no parts, and she's right here.	Enhorabuena, Leonard, has superado mi prueba secreta de lealtad. La verdad es que no tenía un affaire con la señora de la cafetería. Solo una mujer puede tocarme mis partes y está aquí delante.	Congratulations, Leonard, you passed my secret loyalty test. The truth is, I wasn't having an affair with the cafeteria lady. Only one woman can touch my parts and she's right here in front of me.	Enhorabuena, Leonard, has pasado mi test de lealtad. Nunca he tenido una aventura con la de la cafetería. Solo hay una mujer que me toca las partes nobles y está aquí.	Congratulations, Leonard, you passed my loyalty test. I've never had an affair with the cafeteria lady. There's only one woman who touches my privates and she's here.

| Amy | Sheldon (touches him) | Sheldon. | Sheldon. | Sheldon. | Sheldon. |
| Sheldon | No, no (removes her hand) | Ahora no. | Not now. | Parte noble. | Privates. |

Table A4
Type: Cultural - - - Dubbed: any joke / Subtitled: same joke - - - ECR Strategy: generalization and complete marked retention (This American Life).
Episode 9: The Citation Negation (14:04-14:09)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Leonard	So, what are you listening to, This American Life?	¿Qué estabas escuchando, alguna tertulia?	What were you listening to, a talk show?	¿Y qué escuchas, *This American Life?*	And what do you listen to, This American Life?

Table A5
Type: Complex [cultural and language-dependent] - - - Dubbed: same joke / Subtitled: lost joke - - - ECR Strategy: complete marked retention (Rocky IV).
Episode 10: The VCR Illumination (00:46-00:55)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Leonard	Uh, also no talk of Rocky IV.	Tampoco se puede hablar de Rocky IV.	Nor can we talk about Rocky IV.	Ah, prohibido hablar de Rocky IV.	Ah, it is forbidden to talk about Rocky IV.
Bernadette	Why Rocky IV?	¿Por qué Rocky IV?	Why Rocky IV?	¿Por qué *Rocky IV?*	Why Rocky IV?
Howard	Because he fights a Russian. I'm sorry about her.	Porque lucha contra un ruso. Perdonad a la pobre.	Because he fights a Russian. Excuse the poor thing.	Porque pelea contra un ruso. Lo siento por ella.	Because she fights a Russian. I feel sorry for her.

Table A6

Type: Cultural - - - Dubbed: same joke / Subtitled: same joke - - - ECR Strategy: generalization and complete marked retention (Jeopardy! and vintage).
Episode 10: The VCR Illumination (04:38-04:53)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Bernadette	What's on the tape?	¿Qué hay en esa cinta?	What's on that tape?	¿Qué hay en la cinta?	What's on the tape?
Howard	Not sure. I used to record a lot of *Jeopardy!* for my mom, but if I push play and you see some naked people…	No estoy seguro. Le grababa muchos concursos a mi madre, pero si le doy al play y ves gente desnuda…	I'm not sure. I used to tape a lot of contests for my mom, but if I push play and you see naked people…	No lo sé. Solía grabar *Jeopardy!* para mi madre. Pero si le doy al play, y ves gente desnuda…	I don't know. I used to record Jeopardy! for my mother. But if I push play, and you see naked people…
Bernadette	Got it. What is porn?	Entendido. ¿Qué es el porno?	Got it. What is porn?	Lo pillo. ¿Qué es el porno?	I get it. What is porn?
Howard	Uh, we were looking for "vintage '80s erotica," but I'll accept it.	La respuesta correcta es erotismo vintage de los años ochenta.	The correct answer is vintage eighties eroticism.	La respuesta correcta era "erótica *vintage* de los 80", pero lo aceptaremos.	The correct answer was "vintage '80s erotica," but we'll take it.

Table A7
Type: Cultural - - - Dubbed: lost joke / Subtitled: same joke - - - ECR Strategy: complete marked retention/generalization (superordinate term) and complete marked retention (America's Got Talent).
Episode 10: The VCR Illumination (11:00-11:13)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Raj	Well, as someone who has watched every episode of America's Got Talent, I'm getting pretty good at telling when some American's got talent. Seriously, Heidi and I agree like, 90% of the time.	Bueno, como alguien que ha visto todos los episodios de American's Got Talent, se me da bastante bien saber cuándo un americano tiene talento. En serio, coincido con los jueces el noventa por ciento de las veces.	Well, as someone who has watched every episode of American's Got Talent, I'm pretty good at knowing when an American has talent. Seriously, I agree with the judges 90% of the time.	Como alguien que ha visto todos los episodios de *America's Got Talent*, se me da bien decir cuando un estadounidense tiene talento. En serio, Heidi y yo coincidimos el 90 por ciento del tiempo.	As someone who has watched every episode of America's Got Talent, I'm good at telling when an American has talent. Seriously, Heidi and I agree 90% of the time.

Table A8
Type: Complex [language and visual] - - - Dubbed: omitted / Subtitled: omitted.
Episode 10: The VCR Illumination (11:30-12:09)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Subtitled Version
Howard	I've got magic to do, just for you. I've got miracle plays to play. I've got parts to perform, hearts to warm. Kings and things to take by storm as we go along our way.	[Not dubbed into Spanish]	[Not subtitled into Spanish]

Table A9

Type: Complex [visual and language-dependent] - - - Dubbed: lost joke / Subtitled: same joke.
Episode 10: The VCR Illumination (15:36-15:43)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Howard	I'm not scared. I don't like the act. It's over-the-top and weird and has more jazz hands than magic.	No tengo miedo, es que no me gusta el número. Es exagerado y raro y tiene más gestos de jazz que magia	I'm not afraid, I just don't like the act. It's over-the-top and weird and has more jazz gestures than magic.	No tengo miedo. No me gusta la actuación. Es exagerada, rara y tiene más manos de jazz que magia.	I am not afraid. I don't like the performance. It's over-the-top, weird and has more jazz hands than magic.

Table A10

Type: Complex [cultural and language-dependent]-Dubbed: same joke / Subtitled: same joke - - -
ECR Strategy: cultural substitution.
Episode 10: The VCR Illumination (17:29-17:36)

Character	Original Version	Dubbed Version	Gloss	Subtitled Version	Gloss
Coach	Or you can get out there and give them hell.	O podéis salir y darles por saco.	Or you can go out and give them hell.	O podéis salir y darles caña.	Or you can go out and beat them.
Boy	Yeah! Let's give them hell!	Sí, vamos a darles por saco.	Yes, let's give them hell.	Sí, démosles caña.	Yes, let's give them a good beating.
Coach	Watch your mouth, your mom might…	Cuidado con las palabrotas que tu madre…	Be careful with swear words or your mother…	Cuidado con esa boca. Tu madre podría…	Watch your mouth. Your mother might…