**TRANSLATING EUPHEMISMS IN AN AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIUM.
THE CASE OF STAND-UP COMEDY**

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Abstract: *The present paper investigates the difficulties in preserving humour in translating euphemisms in a specific, popular comedy genre: stand-up comedy. The investigation goes beyond the lexical level and focuses on the constraints of the audio-visual translation as well.*

Keywords: *audio-visual translation, euphemisms, humour.*

1. Introduction

In our ever-accelerating world, people's favourite form of entertainment is watching shows on the internet or on television. Live shows compete with books to get our attention and time and they frequently win the battle, due to the magical combination of image, sound, music, lights, the actor's talents and beauty they have to offer. Given the fact that most of the shows broadcasted in Romania on the Internet or on television channels are in English, these need to be made accessible to the general public. In Romania, this is achieved by means of subtitling, and very rarely by dubbing. "Subtitling is the dominant form of audio-visual translation in Romania and other small European countries such as The Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, Israel, Finland and other Nordic countries, which are most commonly defined as subtitling countries" (Gottlieb 1992:169; see also Dries 1995:26).

Our society has become dependent on mass media and since audio-visual media has brought along a large number of products and programmes from country to country, from culture to culture, they need to be translated in order to be understood by speakers of other languages.

As mentioned before, the TV and the Internet have won the battle against books, so what we see in movies and broadcasts is what matters nowadays. The shows are, in most cases, the reality that surrounds us, representing all aspects of society, hence the importance of understanding them not only on the basis of their submitted images, but through the verbal message as well, and thus translating the lines in a correct and close to the original version is essential. They are like mirrors, reflecting human society in all its aspects.

In a growing world of mass media, where its impact covers all cultures around the globe, the video productions are an excellent medium. So, whether the show is from an insignificant country or an important one, the main goal is to bring joy to the viewers. The strength of a translated show lies in the accurate choice of words by the translator. The creativity, imagination and improvisation, of the audio-visual translators must guide them to make sure that the script translation is faithful to the source version.

The communication and spreading of cultural elements, history, diversity, in a globalized world is well performed by audio-visual products. Language becomes, thus, a useful tool in delivering clear and interesting contents to the people.

In the present paper, I will attempt a case-study analysis on the translation of a specific audio-visual genre: the stand-up comedy.

2. The Data

The corpus I have used for translation and analysis has a twofold nature: it targets both English as a source language and Romanian as a target language. To be more precise, I start from George Carlin's monologue *Soft language*, on the one hand, and on the other, from a translated version of this text, representing a collective outcome, produced by students of the master's degree in the Theory and Practice of Translation programme in 2018. The present study is part of a larger research applied to audio-visual translation.

In what follows, I will offer a concise introduction of the source-text, George Carlin's monologue *Soft language*.

George Carlin is an American professional comic, social critic, humourist, entertainer and essayist/writer, who has won five Grammy Awards for his parody collections. Carlin is known for his basic, now and then dark, humour and for his sentiments on different prominent issues, for example, legislative issues, the English language, religion, or different untouchable subjects. For over fifty years, George Carlin has used his sharp humour to mock hypocrisy in individuals' activities and words. His method of handling social issues is by and large observed as incapacitating and profound, pleasant and wise.

I have chosen *Soft language* since it was created with the conspicuous goal to launch, in an exaggerated and unexpected way, the essence of language change in an advanced globalized world.

2.1. Features of the source text

Cultural equivalence is supposed to depend on the degree of connectedness between two languages that represent two different cultures. In this study, the source-text language, English, and the target-text language, Romanian, are related only by their Indo-European origin, and still have a one-way influence on each other, namely English has an influence upon Romanian.

The data in this paper reflects how the same humorous structures control the common environment between the source language and the target language. On the part of the translator, this requires an attempt to include some common background and account for context-sensitive expressions.

George Carlin's text *Soft language* is fully constructed upon euphemisms, which is also the subtitle of the monologue. *The Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (2003) defines euphemism as "a polite word or expression that is used to refer to things which people may find upsetting or embarrassing to talk about, for example sex, the human body, or death." Allan and Burridge (1991:14) offer this definition:

Euphemisms are alternatives to dispreferred expressions, and are used to avoid possible loss of face. The dispreferred expression may be taboo, fearsome, distasteful, or for some other reason have too many negative connotations to felicitously execute speaker's communicative intention on a given occasion.

In these two definitions, "'loss of face' is the reason beyond option for euphemism by interactants to achieve understanding the speaker's intentions and subsequently the lexical correlates in his or her utterances" (Farghal 1995:366). The definitions also raise the notion of felicity, i.e., 'appropriateness' or, as Farghal further explains, "the language user's option for a euphemism often emanates from contextual factors such as the social relationship between speaker and addressee or the level of formality induced by the setting" (Farghal 1995). Euphemism is then employed as "an avoidance strategy with a view to ameliorate a situation" (Leech 2003:53).

In extension to some explicitly semantic associations between the major items used by Carlin, there is a set of characteristics which are noteworthy to recording the entertaining instruments inside the stand-up comedy.

Along these lines my approach will stretch out from the mere translation of a written text to applying an audio-visual translation type, fit for the genre, namely the offline narrative subtitling. It requires both coherence and accuracy but mostly creativity for the lexical gaps encountered in the translation process.

2.2.The sense of humour: American comedy and new forms of entertainment

Comedy plays an undeniably focal role in our cultural life. Following the recent resurgence of TV stand-up and the continuing growth of the live circuit, comedy has emerged as a 'booming' multi-million dollar industry and an important staging point for understanding cultural tastes and identities. (Medhurst 2007)

Regardless of this, comedy has been given minimal insightful consideration. Customarily thought to be "low-brow art *par excellence*" (Kuipers 2006:374), comedy has largely been viewed as a discredited art form and consigned to the mediocre cultural position of entertainment rather than art (Double 2007).

In any case, the position of comedy within the American cultural values has ostensibly modified altogether since the early 1980s. However, while there may be solid proof showing a change in the worldview of comic creation, there is small comprehension of how this change has been reflected in examples of utilization. Undoubtedly, parody has to a great extent been excluded from huge scope sociological investigations of social utilization. Indeed, even in the most extensive appraisal of social practices, Bennett's (2009:132-51) parody was either disregarded or characterized dangerously as a "middlebrow" TV subgenre. It has recently been replaced by the emerging and developing genre of stand-up comedy, available both on television and the Internet.

3. The Corpus

This section contains the source text and the proposed translation, which is followed by a discussion of the problems encountered.

3.1.Source text: *Soft Language (Euphemisms)* by George Carlin

"I don't like words that hide the truth. I don't like words that conceal reality. I don't like euphemisms, or euphemistic language. And American English is loaded with euphemisms. Cause Americans have a lot of trouble dealing with reality. Americans have trouble facing the truth, so they invent the kind of a soft language to protect themselves from it, and it gets worse with every generation. For some reason, it just keeps getting worse. I'll give you an example of that. There's a condition in combat. Most people know about it. It's when a fighting person's nervous system has been stressed to its absolute peak and maximum. Can't take any more input. The nervous system has either (click) snapped or is about to snap. In the first world war, that condition was called shell shock. Simple, honest, direct language. Two syllables, shell shock. Almost sounds like the guns themselves. That was seventy years ago. Then a whole generation went by and the second world war came along and the very same combat condition was called battle fatigue. Four syllables now. Takes a little longer to say. Doesn't seem to hurt as much. Fatigue is a nicer word than shock. Shell shock! Battle fatigue. Then we had the war in Korea, 1950. Madison Avenue was riding high by that time, and the very same combat condition was called operational exhaustion. Hey, we're up to eight syllables now! And the humanity has been squeezed completely out of the phrase. It's totally sterile now. Operational exhaustion. Sounds like something that might happen to your car. Then of course, came the war in Vietnam, which has only been over for about sixteen or seventeen years, and thanks to the lies and deceptions surrounding that

war, I guess it's no surprise that the very same condition was called post-traumatic stress disorder. Still eight syllables, but we've added a hyphen! And the pain is completely buried under jargon. Post-traumatic stress disorder. I'll bet you if we'd still been calling it shell shock, some of those Vietnam veterans might have gotten the attention they needed at the time. I'll betcha. I'll betcha.

But. But, it didn't happen, and one of the reasons. One of the reasons is because we were using that soft language. That language that takes the life out of life. And it is a function of time. It does keep getting worse. I'll give you another example. Sometime during my life. Sometime during my life, toilet paper became bathroom tissue. I wasn't notified of this. No one asked me if I agreed with it. It just happened. Toilet paper became bathroom tissue. Sneakers became running shoes. False teeth became dental appliances. Medicine became medication. Information became directory assistance. The dump became the landfill. Car crashes became automobile accidents. Partly cloudy became partly sunny. Motels became motor lodges. House trailers became mobile homes. Used cars became previously owned transportation. Room service became guest-room dining. And constipation became occasional irregularity. When I was a little kid, if I got sick, they wanted me to go to the hospital and see a doctor. Now they want me to go to a health maintenance organization...or a wellness center to consult a healthcare delivery professional. Poor people used to live in slums. Now the economically disadvantaged occupy substandard housing in the inner cities. And they're broke! They're broke! They don't have a negative cash-flow position. They're fucking broke! Cause a lot of them were fired. You know, fired. Management wanted to curtail redundancies in the human resources area, so many people are no longer viable members of the workforce.

Smug, greedy, well-fed white people have invented a language to conceal their sins. It's as simple as that. The CIA doesn't kill anybody anymore, they neutralize people...or they depopulate the area. The government doesn't lie, it engages in disinformation. The pentagon actually measures nuclear radiation in something they call sunshine units. Israeli murderers are called commandos. Arab commandos are called terrorists. Contra killers are called freedom fighters. Well, if crime fighters fight crime and firefighters fight fire, what do freedom fighters fight? They never mention that part of it to us, do they? Never mention that part of it.

And...and some of this stuff is just silly, we all know that, like on the airlines, they say they want to pre-board. Well, what the hell is pre-board, what does that mean? To get on before you get on? They say they're going to pre-board those passengers in need of special assistance. Cripples! Simple honest direct language. There is no shame attached to the word cripple that I can find in any dictionary. No shame attached to it, in fact it's a word used in bible translations. Jesus healed the cripples. Doesn't take seven words to describe that condition. But we don't have any cripples in this country anymore. We have the physically challenged. Is that a grotesque enough evasion for you? How about differently abled. I've heard them called that. Differently abled! You can't even call these people handicapped anymore. They'll say, "Were not handicapped. Were handicapable!" These poor people have been bullshitted by the system into believing that if you change the name of the condition, somehow, you'll change the condition. Well, hey cousin, pppsssppttttt. Doesn't happen. Doesn't happen.

We have no more deaf people in this country, hearing impaired. No one's blind anymore, partially sighted or visually impaired. We have no more stupid people. Everyone has a learning disorder...or he's minimally exceptional. How would you like to be told that about your child? "He's minimally exceptional." "Oohh, thank god for that." Psychologists actually have started calling ugly people, those with severe appearance deficits. It's getting so bad, that any day now I expect to hear a rape victim referred to as an unwilling sperm recipient.

And we have no more old people in this country. No more old people. We shipped them all away, and we brought in these senior citizens. Isn't that a typically American twentieth century phrase? Bloodless, lifeless, no pulse in one of them. A senior citizen. But I've accepted that one, I've come to terms with it. I know it's to stay. We'll never get rid of it. That's what they're going to be called, so I'll relax on that, but the one I do resist. The one I keep resisting is when they look at an old guy and they'll say, "Look at him Dan! He's ninety years young." Imagine the fear of aging that reveals. To not even be able to use the word "old" to describe somebody. To have to use an antonym. And fear of aging is natural. It's universal. Isn't it? We all have that. No one wants to get old. No one wants to die, but we do! So, we bullshit ourselves. I started bullshitting myself when I got to my forties. As soon as I got into my forties I'd look in the mirror and I'd say, "well, I...I guess I'm getting...older." Older sounds a little better than old doesn't it? Sounds like it might even last a little longer. Bullshit, I'm getting old! And it's okay, because thanks to our fear of death in this country, I won't have to die...I'll pass away. Or I'll expire like a magazine subscription. If it happens in the hospital, they'll call it a terminal episode. The insurance company will refer to it as negative patient-care outcome. And if it's the result of malpractice, they'll say it was a therapeutic misadventure. I'm telling you, some of this

language makes me want to vomit. Well, maybe not vomit. Makes me want to engage in an involuntary personal protein spill."

(*Soft Language (Eufemisms)* by George Carlin, <https://www.thoughtco.com/soft-language-euphemism-1692111>)

3.2. Translated text: *Limba moale*

For research purposes, the equivalent euphemisms in the following translation have been italicised.

Nu îmi plac cuvintele ce ascund adevărul. Nu îmi plac cuvintele care ascund realitatea. Nu îmi plac eufemismele sau limbajul eufemistic. Și engleza americană e încărcată de eufemisme. Pentru că americanii au multe probleme cu realitatea. Americanii au probleme cu adevărul, așa că inventează un limbaj moale pentru a se proteja de el și se înrăutățește cu fiecare generație. Din anumite motive se înrăutățește, îți voi da un exemplu.

Există o situație în luptă. Cei mai mulți oameni știu despre aceasta. Este momentul în care sistemul nervos al unei persoane în luptă este stresat până la maximul absolut. Nu mai poate prelua date. Sistemul nervos a cedat sau este pe punctul de a ceda.

În primul război mondial, aceasta situație a fost numită *șoc*. Limbă simplă, cinstită, directă. Două silabe, *șocuri*. Sună aproape ca niște arme.

Asta a fost acum șaptezeci de ani. Apoi a trecut o întreagă generație și a venit al doilea război mondial și aceeași stare de luptă a fost numită *oboseală*. Acum, patru silabe. Durează mai mult timp. Nu pare să facă atât de mult rău. Oboseala este un cuvânt mai bun decât șocul. *Șoc! Oboseală*.

Apoi am avut războiul din Coreea, în 1950. Madison era foarte popular pe vremea aceea, și aceeași stare de luptă a fost numită *epuizare operațională*. Hei, avem acum până la unsprezece silabe! Și umanitatea a fost scoasă complet din frază. E complet steril acum. *Epuizare operațională*. Sună ca ceva ce s-ar putea întâmpla cu mașina ta.

Apoi, bineînțeles, a venit războiul din Vietnam, care s-a terminat de doar șaisprezece sau șaptesprezece ani, și mulțumită minciunilor și înșelăciunilor din jurul războiului, cred că nu este o surpriză că aceeași stare a fost numită *tulburarea de stres post-traumatic*. Tot atâtea silabe, dar am adăugat o cratimă! Și durerea este complet îngropată sub jargon. *Stres post-traumatic*.

Pun pariu că, dacă am fi numit-o încă *șoc*, unii dintre veteranii din Vietnam ar fi putut obține atenția de care aveau nevoie atunci. Pun pariu. Pun pariu.

Mai dau încă un exemplu. Cândva, în timpul vieții mele, *hârtia igienică* a devenit *șervețel de baie*. Nu am fost informat despre asta. Nimeni nu m-a întrebat dacă sunt de acord cu asta. Doar s-a întâmplat. *Hârtia igienică* a devenit *șervețel de baie*. *Adidașii* au devenit *pantofi de alergare*. *Dinții falși* au devenit *aparate dentare*. *Medicamentele* au devenit *medicație*. *Informațiile* au devenit *asistență de direcționare*. *Groapa de gunoi* a devenit *teren de umplere*. *Accidentele auto* au devenit *accidente de automobile*. *Parțial noros* a devenit *parțial înșorit*. *Motelurile* au devenit *cabane motorizate*. *Rulotele* au devenit *case mobile*. *Autovehiculele uzate* au devenit *transport deținut anterior*. *Room service* a devenit *masă pentru musafiri*. *Constipația* a devenit o *neregularitate ocazională*.

Când eram copil, dacă mă îmbolnăveam, voiam să merg la spital și să văd un doctor. Acum ei vor să mă duc la o *unitate de menținere a sănătății*. Sau un *centru de wellness* pentru a consulta un *profesionist în domeniul sănătății*. Oamenii săraci trăiau în *mahalale*. Acum, cei *dezavantajați economic* ocupă *locuințe substandard* în orașe. Și sunt săraci! Sunt săraci. Nu au o *situație negativă a fluxului de bani*. Sunt săraci! Pentru că mulți dintre ei au fost concediați. Știți, *concediat*. Managementul a dorit să *reducă redundanța din domeniul resurselor umane*. Atât de mulți oameni nu mai sunt *membri viabili ai forței de muncă*.

Oamenii albi, lacomi, bine hrăniți au inventat un limbaj pentru a le ascunde păcatele. Este atât de simplu. CIA nu mai *ucide* oameni, ei *neutralizează* oamenii, sau *depopulează* o zonă. Guvernul nu *mint*, se *angajează în dezinformare*. Pentagonul de fapt *măsoară radiațiile* în ceva ce ei numesc *unități solare*. Criminalii israelieni sunt numiți *comuniști*. Arabii sunt numiți *teroriști*. *Contra-ucigașii* sunt numiți *luptători pentru libertate*. Ei bine dacă luptătorii împotriva crimei luptă împotriva crimelor și pompierii luptă împotriva focului, ce luptă duc luptătorii libertății? Nu ne spun niciodată această parte, nu-i așa?

Și unele dintre aceste lucruri sunt chiar prostii. Noi știm asta. Ca și atunci când companiile aeriene spun de pre-îmbarcare. Ce naiba e pre-îmbarcarea? Ce înseamnă asta? Să urcați înainte să urcați?

Ei spun că o să pre-îmbarce pasagerii care au nevoie de *asistență specială* ...*infirmi*! Limbaj simplu, onest și direct. Nu există nici o rușine atașată cuvântului infirm pe care îl găsesc în orice dicționar. De fapt este un cuvânt folosit în traduceri Biblice. Nu-ți ia șapte cuvinte pentru a descrie

aceasta condiție. Dar nu mai avem *infirmi* în această țară. Avem persoane *provocate fizic*. Este o evaziune suficient de grotescă pentru tine? Ce zici despre *cu altfel de abilități*? Am auzit-o și pe aceasta. Altfel! Nici măcar nu-i poți numi pe acești oameni cu handicap. Ei spun: “nu suntem *handicapați*, suntem *handi-capabili*!” acești oameni au fost păcăliți de sistem pentru a crede că dacă schimbă numele condiției, vor schimba și condiția. Ei bine, vere ... nu se întâmplă așa!

Nu mai avem oameni *surzi* în această țară. Oameni *cu deficiențe de auz*. Nu mai sunt oameni *orbi*. Persoane *cu deficiențe de vedere*. Nu mai sunt oameni *proști*, toată lumea are o *tulburare de învățare*. Sau este *minimal excepțional*. Cum ți-ar plăcea să spui asta despre copilul tău? “e minimal de excepțional”. Psihologii au început să îi numească pe cei *urâți* ca având *deficiențe severe de înfățișare*. Începe să fie atât de rău că în curând mă aștept să aud o victimă a violului fiind numită *un destinatar involuntar de spermă*!

Și nu mai avem bătrâni în această țară. Gata cu *bătrânii*. I-am trimis pe toți departe și am adus în loc *cețățeni seniori*. Nu este o frază tipic americană din secolul al XX-lea? Nesângeroasă. Fără viață. Fără puls în ele. Un cețățean senior. Dar am acceptat-o pe asta. M-am împăcat cu ea. Știu că este aici ca să rămână. Nu o să scăpăm de ea niciodată. Dar la ce mă opun, la ce continui să mă opun, este atunci când ei se uită la un bătrân și spun “Uită-te la Dan, *e tânăr de 90 de ani*”. Imaginează-ți frica de îmbătrânire care se dezvăluie. Să nu poți folosi cuvântul bătrân pentru a descrie pe cineva. Să trebuiască să folosești un antonim.

Și frica de îmbătrânire e naturală. E universală, nu? Cu toții avem asta. Nimeni nu vrea să îmbătrânească. Nimeni nu vrea să moară. Dar o facem. Deci ne păcălim. Am început să mă păcălesc când am ajuns la vârsta de 40 de ani. Mă uitam în oglindă și spuneam: “ei bine ... cred că sunt ... mai în vârstă”. Mai în vârstă sună puțin mai bine decât bătrân, nu-i așa? Sună ca și cum ar dura puțin mai mult. Îmbătrânesc. Și e ok. Pentru că mulțumită fricii de moarte din această țară nu va fi nevoie să *mor*. Voi *trece dincolo*. Sau voi *expira*, ca un abonament la o revistă. Dacă se întâmplă în spital îl vor numi *un episod terminal*. Compania de asigurări se va referi la acesta ca fiind *un rezultat negativ al îngrijirii pacientului*. Și dacă e rezultatul unei greșeli medicale ei o vor numi o *greșeala terapeutică*.

Îți spun, o parte din această limbă mă face să vomit. Ei bine, poate nu chiar să vomit ... mă face să vreau să mă angajez într-o *deversare involuntară de proteine personale*.

4. Discussion

4.2. Technical constraints

Not at all like the dubber, who makes an interpretation of speech into speech, the subtitler needs to record what is spoken on the soundtrack of the audio-visual product.

The specialized spatial and wordly limitations of mass media programs relate straightforwardly to the arrangement of captions.

A. Space

In the limited space allowed for a subtitle there is no room for long explanations. Two lines of text are usually the norm, and the number of characters per line depends on a number of factors, including the subtitling workstation used. Since readability of the text is of paramount importance, it has been suggested that an ideal subtitle is a sentence long, with the clauses of which it consists placed on separate lines. (Diaz Cintas and Remael 2007:172–80)

In view of this, the interpreter needs to reevaluate intelligibility procedures so as to boost the retrievability of planned significance from a more succinct objective language form. In eye-to-eye correspondence, the ordinary repetition of discourse gives listeners more than one possibility of getting proposed importance; in captioning, the excess is definitely diminished and odds of recovering lost significance are in this way less. “Moreover, unlike other forms of written communication, this mode does not allow the reader to back-track for the purpose of retrieving meaning” (Hatim and Mason 1997:65).

Notwithstanding semantic restrictions, there is the visual element. Attempting their best to read all that has been transferred, viewers are incapable to focus on other significant

visual data and once in a while additionally on oral data. This is unfortunate since mass media programs join words and pictures, and the interpretation ought to watch the interrelation between the manner in which a story is told and where it appears. Captions ought to synchronize with discourse, yet in addition with picture. In this particular case, this aspect is less relevant since there is only the protagonist in the frame throughout the whole performance and the danger of covering a too large portion of the screen is minimal.

When the subtitles follow each other in rapid succession, reading one two-liner appears to be less strenuous than reading two one-liners containing the same amount of information. Precise timing has usually been defined in terms of subtitle–speech synchronization. Baker indicates that subtitles overrunning shot changes cause perceptual confusion. (Diaz-Cintas and Anderman 2009:90)

B. Time

A significant part of the captioning cycle is the separating of expected loss of data: for the reasons of communicating subtleties, the composed word can't in any way, shape or form rival discourse. Henceforth an enormous number of lexical things will in general be required, so as to coordinate what is passed on by pressure, cadence and sound. Ordinarily, be that as it may, the subtitler doesn't have space for longwinded details or complex structures: so as to improve clarity, quickness is the embodiment. Furthermore, if the captions are to stay on the screen long enough for crowds to understand them, compression is an absolute necessity, which thus can bring about an unfortunate loss of lexical significance. Regularly, it is difficult to choose what to forget about. In spite of the fact that there are excess etymological highlights in discourse, in some cases even slight oversights may achieve huge changes in significance.

The length of a caption is legitimately identified with its live time. Precise in and out planning is significant and the content in the captions ought to consistently be in offset with the suitable perusing time setting.

Generalisations about reading speed and rate of standardised presentation are not recommended. According to Luyken et al. (1991:31), "the reading speed of adult viewers hovers around 150 to 180 words per minute. This is, however, subject to extensive variation and depends on the complexity of the linguistic and factual information that the subtitles contain. If lexical density is high, accessibility to the information tends to be low, which calls for added subtitle exposure time". Furthermore, readability is influenced by the audio-visual product genre: crime stories, may give subtitlers and audience a harder time than love stories.

An important point concerns reading speed that may be affected by the viewers' attitude to the subject matter. Gottlieb (1997) quoted in Diaz-Cintas and Anderman (2009:85) highlights the fact that

subtitling is additive by nature, that is verbal material is added to the original programme and nothing is removed from it. The usefulness of this addition, however, depends on the viewers' comprehension of the original dialogue. It is true that tone of voice, stress and intonation may contribute to conveying information across language barriers, but if source and target languages are poles apart in terms of lexis, the value of keeping the original soundtrack may be rather limited.

C. Presentation

Subtitles can take up to 20% of screen space. Significant variables for their clarity are the size of the characters, their situation on screen. In our computerized age, a large portion of these issues have been fathomed.

4.2. Textual constraints

In subtitling, language transfer takes place at two levels, from speech to writing, from the soundtrack to the written subtitles. This mode shift brings forward a number of issues in processing the message and keeping the cohesion in the target product.

In subtitling both source and target texts are present simultaneously. The viewer of a captioned program has in any event two distinct kinds of data on which to focus: the activity on the screen, and the translation of the dialogue/monologue, that is the captions. The difficulty of the situation lies in the timing of the subtitles.

In the present case of translating George Carlin's *Soft Language*, as in all cases of stand-up comedy subtitling, the temporal succession is probably the hardest of constraints. On the other hand, it is more flexible than in a movie where every missed frame can lead to misunderstanding the action.

The temporal succession of subtitles is quite different from the linear succession of sentences in a book; it does not allow the eye to move backwards or forwards to clarify misunderstandings, recapitulate the basic facts or see what will happen next. This can be done, however, when watching a film or a programme on video or DVD by using the rewind function. As a result, in order for the subtitled text to be successful, it needs to preserve the 'sequence of speech acts in such a way as to relay the dynamics of communication'. (Mason 1989:15)

The role of grammar and word order in subtitling is crucial. In the present translation I consider that the simpler and more widespread use of a subtitle's syntactic structure is the least effort required to decipher its meaning, particularly since the source text is essentially oral.

Due to the restricted space commonly accessible for captions, certain components of the soundtrack must be excluded, and the conspicuous arrangement is to get rid of repetitive components of discourse. Excess helps members in a discussion handle its planned importance all the more effectively and its end from film discourse may, accordingly, debilitate attachment in the captioned text. The question then is

to what extent the predictability of discourse is affected by the systematic deletion of redundant features and the impact this may have on the viewers' understanding of the narrative. There is, however, a strong link between the dialogue of a film and the context in which it takes place. Apart from linguistic redundancy in audiovisual programmes, there is also situational redundancy that usually works in favour of the translator. The visual information often helps viewers process the subtitles, and to a certain extent this compensates for the limited verbal information they contain. For example, aspects of interpersonal communication may be found in intonation, rhythm and the facial and kinesic movements that accompany the dialogue which are, to an extent, universal. (Nir 1984:90)

4.3. Preserving humour at the linguistic level

The text under scrutiny is extremely dense, containing a wide range of vocabulary items, which cover areas of great interest, but from varied fields like war, home utilities, clothing, health, security, economy, etc.

Most of the humour present in *Soft Language* is lexical humour and deictic referral. The biggest challenge in this translation is to find appropriate lexical items or phrases to incorporate both the referent and the irony hidden behind it.

A number of words and phrases have already acquired standardised equivalents in Romanian and those raised no translation problems: *hearing impaired* – *cu deficiență de auz*, *visually impaired* – *cu deficiență de vedere*, *learning disorder* – *tulburări de învățare*, etc.

Below I will mention those examples where a certain difficulty in establishing equivalence occurred.

The achievement of linguistic humour is evaluated against the frame provided by the *The General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH) (Attardo 2002). The reader should refer to Attardo and Raskin (1991) and Attardo (1994, 2001) for full treatments of the theory. GTVH is a revision and extension of Raskin's *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* (1985). *The Script Opposition* (SO) as a source of humour is explained by Raskin (1985:99): "a content can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying content in the event that the conditions are fulfilled. The content is suitable, completely or in portion, with two unlike scripts. The two scripts of the adaptable content are inverse."

The use of euphemisms is ridiculed by George Carlin in the context of the political correctness trend which generates hilarious vocabulary, sometimes untranslatable. Thus, the series of lexical items referring to an after-war condition were a little troublesome to translate because there was also the length constraint:

shell shock - șoc

battle fatigue - oboseală

operational exhaustion - epuizare operațională

post-traumatic stress disorder - tulburarea de stres post-traumatic

If in the first two cases a reduction in translation was applied, in the last two, a word-for-word translation method was used since there was no other standardised and accepted equivalent. The humour was obtained here by the opposition between the first version and the last, as far as the ever-increasing number of syllables is concerned, suggesting that a longer phrase is taken more seriously than a short one.

In terms of the General Theory of Linguistic Humour (Attardo 2002) this technique can be included in the strategy of *Script Opposition* (SO). With *toilet paper* the equivalence is recognised in *hârtie igienică*, but with *bathroom tissue*, the word-for-word translation *șervețel de baie* lacks in naturalness, and thus diminishes the humorous effect.

A cultural problem was encountered when translating *sneakers* and the equivalent in popularity and function proved to be, paradoxically, *adidași* (a sports brand used in the Romanian culture as a common noun). The opposite, *running shoes* is transferred identically in Romanian.

The English language is prone to word formation, while Romanian is rather rigid by comparison. This made the appearance of the new vocabulary generated by the political correctness trend a rather slow and weak process. Consequently, the translator has to fight the euphemisms and is not always successful. The cases where a considerable loss of humour was felt, and implicitly of meaning, in the translation of *Soft Language* were the afore mentioned cases.

For compounds containing the element *challenged*, the literal translation *provocat* contains no linguistic humour at all, and consequently we face a significant loss of humorous effect: *physically challenged* – *provocat fizic*.

Another example of translation loss is *handicapable*, where the Romanian *handicapabil* is nothing but a calque.

The compounds with *fighter* create translation difficulties since they involve paraphrasing with various prepositions.

crime fighters – luptători împotriva crimei

fire fighters – pompieri

freedom fighters - luptătorii pentru libertate

In the context, humour is the outcome of a logical fracture: some fighters fight *for* something, others fight *against* something. The translated version undergoes a loss of humorous effect but a gain in meaning because the presence of the prepositions allows a clear disambiguation.

A very special situation of translation loss both at the level of meaning and humour is the phrase *a negative cash-flow position*, literally translated by *o poziție negativă a fluxului de bani*, where the very translation of *cash-flow* encounters a lexical gap in Romanian.

Some instances witness loss of humour even by using a translation method based on paraphrasing: *“The management wanted to curtail redundancies in the human resources area, so many people are no longer viable members of the workforce.”* - *Managementul a dorit să reducă disponibilizările din domeniul resurselor umane. Atât de mulți oameni nu mai sunt membri viabili ai forței de muncă.*

5. Conclusion

In the present paper, I tried to present some of the difficulties encountered in the process of subtitling an audio-video product, namely a stand-up comedy show, where the difficulty is augmented by the mechanisms of linguistic humour which are not culturally equivalent. Sequels to the present paper will explore further aspects of this audio-visual translation.

Subtitlers are faced with a lot of challenges in their work. They must comply with a lot of restrictions in order to create their product. At all times they must put themselves in the viewers' shoes. They must understand that the viewers must have enough time to read the subtitles and watch the action on the screen at the same time. Depending on the duration of the subtitle, there is a limited amount of characters it can contain, including spaces and punctuation. The number of characters is determined based on the viewers' reading speed. One speaks quicker than one can read, hence the imminent need to condense the translation, to render only the essential elements of speech and sacrifice the redundant ones. The subtitler often needs to use shorter words and simpler constructions. Sometimes, a good dictionary of synonyms can be of great help.

The subtitles must at all times correspond with what the speaker is saying at that particular moment. The subtitler cannot transfer a fragment of the utterance to the next subtitle, simply because it does not fit in the subtitle where it belongs. In this case the subtitler can resort to rephrasing, shortening, compressing, and simplification. At times, it is a very difficult task, when all elements of the speech seem important and cannot be left out. If this happens, the subtitler must prioritize those elements and, to a certain extent, rely on the viewers' ability to derive the rest from the context and from the action on the screen, from the soundtrack, from actors' gestures, mimics, and intonation.

Often correct segmentation, i.e. placing the line break where it should be, creates additional constraints for the subtitler. There are instances when the subtitler can fit all the words if he uses the maximum number of characters on both lines, but he cannot do that, because the subject and verb, for example, cannot be placed on two different lines or the conjunction cannot be separated from the sentence it precedes. In these cases, additional compression needs to be undertaken, or the word order must be changed, if possible.

Another challenge is posed by the fact that in the case of stand-up comedy the spoken language is replete with colloquialisms, redundant or unfinished phrases, slang, jargon and a lot of irony. The translator has to fight the natural impulse to grammaticize, standardize and uniformize the language.

Any translator can be challenged to become a good subtitler. With the multitude of amateur subtitles on the web, it is obvious that it is not very difficult to create subtitles using a regular computer and some specialized software. However, the quality, or rather, the lack of quality, of these amateur subtitles leads to the thought that it is not as easy as it seems. To begin with, a good subtitler must know perfectly his/her native language, master its grammar, orthography, punctuation, style, and vocabulary. Secondly, the subtitler must master the

source language. Of course, no one can assert that s/he knows a language perfectly, this is why a good subtitler must learn to recognize his/her own limits and use all the available resources to search the words, idioms, realities s/he doesn't know.

An element, which is not neglectable, is the cultural background of the translator who is bound to do research and acquire relevant information, especially when s/he is involved in translating texts with such subtle components as humour.

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