

Translation Strategies for Wordplay in *The Simpsons*

Pro Gradu Thesis
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19.12.2008
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and aim

The Simpsons is an animated cartoon series with an appeal for adults as well as for children. On the surface it is a fairly straightforward comedy series with more under its core than one perhaps realizes at first. In addition to providing a humorous insight into the life of a in many ways typical American nuclear family, the series actually has an ambiguous nature and it criticises many sides of American culture. This is in many cases achieved with the use of wordplay.

The Simpsons is one of my favourite television series, and having watched it for several years I have paid attention to the exceptional amount of wordplay in it. The series is filled with different types of wordplay that plays a significant role in creating a double reading of *The Simpsons* as a text. In fact, the role of wordplay is so significant that it would be a serious loss to the target audience of *The Simpsons* if it were lost in translation. When I started considering writing my thesis on the translation of wordplay in *The Simpsons*, I naturally started paying much more attention to the subtitles when watching the series, and came to admire Sari Luhtanen's brilliant way of preserving the humorous nature of *The Simpsons* in a great number of the instances of wordplay. This made me even more interested to investigate what kind of translation strategies Luhtanen uses to render the wordplay into Finnish.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Sari Luhtanen has rendered as subtitles the abundant wordplay in *The Simpsons*. With Dirk Delabastita's translation strategies for wordplay as a frame of reference, I am going to investigate which strategies Luhtanen uses to retain the puns in the subtitles. Also the extent to which Luhtanen has had to omit the target text wordplay from the translation will be in the focus of interest. I will perform a quantitative analysis on the data, and discuss examples from the nine episodes of *The Simpsons* that are included in the corpus. Luhtanen has not been interviewed for the purposes of this study, so her possible motivations for using each translation strategy are based on my assumptions only. This study relies heavily on the work of Dirk Delabastita (1996), as his definition and typology of wordplay as well as his range of translation methods for wordplay are both used as frames of reference.

Chapter one of this study is about introducing the topic and the material used for this study. In chapter two I will discuss the concept of wordplay. In chapter three the functions of wordplay will be discussed and chapter four will concentrate on the translation of wordplay. A quantitative analysis of the data is presented in chapter five, and in chapter six the findings will be discussed. Chapter seven concludes the study.

1.2 *The Simpsons* and its Finnish translation

The Simpsons is a series about a typical American middle class family. Homer, the father of the family, who works at a nuclear power plant and Marge, the mother, who is a homemaker, are raising a family of three children in Springfield, an imaginary town located somewhere in the United States. The children are a handful, with the prime cause of problems often being eight-year-old Bart, a lively and rebellious little boy. Lisa, two years Bart's junior, is a bright yet precocious little girl, who also challenges her parents in many ways, mainly by outsmarting them. The youngest child in the family, Maggie, is still a baby. Each episode of *The Simpsons* has a completely self-contained storyline with the main character often being a member of the Simpson family, sometimes another character from the colourful population of the town of Springfield.

The Simpsons, created by cartoonist Matt Groening, started broadcasting in the United States in the year 1987, as a supplement to the Tracey Ullman show. In 1989 it became a half-hour show of its own, and gained immense popularity. In addition to the United States, *The Simpsons* is broadcast in as many as 70 countries and it is translated into over 45 languages.

Whereas most cartoon series have (young) children as their target audience, *The Simpsons* is aimed as much (if not more) at an adult audience as it is to children. As pointed out by Lorenzo et al in the article *The Simpsons/Los Simpson Analysis of an Audiovisual Translation*, the series manages to combine "...two readings: one which is straightforward for children (...) and another that is ambiguous ...for an adult audience" (2003, 275-276), which is the most important reason for the large fan base of heterogeneous ages. The appeal of the show for adults can largely be attributed to the skilful way in which the series subtly parodies American society, aiming its criticism at all spheres of society: politics, religion, the health care system etc. For one thing, many characters in *The Simpsons* are satirical representations of real-life people, living or

dead. Examples of these are the Jewish entertainer, Krusty the Clown, who bears a strong resemblance to the Marx brothers, and the mayor (Quimby) of Springfield who resembles presidents Kennedy and Clinton. Much of the humour and often biting satire is achieved through the dialogue, however, and wordplay is one of the most often used means to achieve this effect. Whereas most cartoon series lack an intellectual side to them, *The Simpsons* makes a refreshing exception, as in addition to tickling the sense of humour of its viewers it also ‘tickles’ the intelligence of its more mature audience.

In Finland *The Simpsons* has aired from the year 1991 onwards, and its Finnish translation is by Sari Luhtanen. As pointed out by Esko Hellgren (2007) in his study of the translation of allusions in *The Simpsons*, Luhtanen has translated all but two episodes (in season one) of the series into Finnish. Luhtanen is in high regard among *The Simpsons* fans, and does indeed do a remarkable job of translating the series for the Finnish-speaking audience. This makes Luhtanen’s translation strategies for wordplay in *The Simpsons* an interesting object of study.

1.3 Material and method

There are currently 18 seasons of *The Simpsons* in existence, and as I started to look for material for this study I soon noticed that the use of wordplay is a feature that is more typical of the later seasons of *The Simpsons* than the very first ones. The dialogue has become notably more complicated and ambiguous as the years have passed. For example in many episodes of *The Simpsons* from the first two seasons the humour lies more in the characters' actions and for example the *way* they talk than what the characters actually *say*. Some of the episodes from these earlier seasons did contain some instances of wordplay, but as the instances were quite few I decided to look for the material first of all in the later seasons.

Naturally one criterion for the episodes chosen for the study was that they contained as much wordplay as possible. Although not a single episode with no wordplay at all was found (except in seasons one and two), some episodes caught on tape were discarded from the study because of the lack of sufficient wordplay. Although some types of wordplay are clearly more common in *The Simpsons* than others, I wanted to include at least one example of each of Dirk Delabastita's (1996) types of wordplay in the study. This criterion had some effect on the choice of episodes that were included in the corpus. Another criterion for the choice of material for this study was that the translator of all the episodes chosen for the study is the same, namely Sari Luhtanen. As mentioned earlier, Esko Hellgren points out in his study *Translation of Allusions in the Animated Cartoon The Simpsons*, that the translator of all but two episodes of *The Simpsons* is Sari Luhtanen. These two episodes are both from season one, so not using any episodes from the first season solved that problem.

The episodes from which the wordplay was located were chosen using the following strategy: I simply analyzed each episode I had on tape and when a sufficient amount of data was collected I stopped looking further. In addition to watching the episodes on tape, the Simpsons Archive (www.snpp.org) available on the Internet was used as an aid for locating wordplay and checking that the data added to the corpus was accurate. Without access to the script of *The Simpsons* episodes, it is sometimes hard to make out what the characters are saying. The Simpsons Archive offers episode capsules from all seasons of *The Simpsons*, collected by the large fan base of the series. If I could not make out the dialogue in some episode, I could simply look for the episode in question in the Simpsons archive, and check there what was said in the dialogue. This was not possible with all of the episodes, though, as the Simpsons Archive only offers episode capsules up to the middle of season 13.

As I looked for the material for this study I noted that often also the episode titles of *The Simpsons* are instances of wordplay. Although the source language viewers never see the original title of each *Simpsons* episode (only the production code appears during the credits at the end of each episode) and it is therefore not available for the target culture viewers either, a Finnish translation of the episode title nevertheless appears on the screen at the beginning of each episode. The reason why Luhtanen has translated the episode titles probably is purely practical: the episode titles are normally provided in television programming guides and sometimes also announced before the program

begins. Because the Finnish translation is there to be seen by the Finnish viewers, I decided to include the translations of episode titles in the corpus as well.

The material for this study comprises nine episodes of *The Simpsons* from seasons 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18. Most episodes were taped between September 2007 and March 2008 from the Finnish television channel Subtv, which broadcasts *The Simpsons* as re-runs every weekday evening. Some of the episodes used in the corpus were taped from the Finnish TV-channel MTV3 as early as the year 2000. As mentioned earlier, the Finnish translator of all of the episodes used in this study is Sari Luhtanen.

Original episode title	Finnish title	Season
Skinner's sense of snow	Lumen taju	12
Tennis the Menace	Tenniskenttä	12
Pokey Mom	Vankilan enkeli	12
HOMR	Älyn jättiläinen	12
Old Yeller-Belly	Koira joka petti	14
Homer's and Ned's Hail Mary Pass	Vedenpaisumus stadionilla	16
Mommie Beerest	Margen baari	16
The Wettest Stories Ever Told	M maailman märimmät tarinat	17
Stop or My Dog Will Shoot	Poliisikoira	18

Table 1. Episodes of *The Simpsons* in the corpus

2. THE CONCEPT OF WORDPLAY

2.1 Definitions of wordplay

According to Delia Chiaro, “the term word play includes every conceivable way in which language is used with the intent to amuse” (1992, 2). Chiaro uses word play as a blanket term that in addition to the most obvious 'containers' of word play, jokes, also includes double entendres and the works of famous punsters. Chiaro goes on to say that “the term word play conjures up an array of conceits ranging from puns and spoonerisms to wisecracks and funny stories” (1992, 4).

Chiaro's definition here serves to demonstrate just how broadly the concept of wordplay can be understood. Many laypersons for example might consider the term to refer to anything amusing or funny put in words, or simply a playful way to use language. Henrik Gottlieb discusses the “vagueness” of the term wordplay and points out that “in trying to provide a scholarly description of human culture, including language, one is often struck by the fuzziness of the subject-matter at hand” (1997, 208).

Also Leppihalme (1997, 141) states that it is hard to find a definition for such a nuanced phenomenon as wordplay. She points out that the classifications of wordplay presented by scholars have often included a great number of classes and subclasses. For example according to Walter Nash (1985) in his book *The Language of Humour*, even some of the most prominent types of puns include as many as twelve different categories.

Obviously, a precise definition for wordplay is needed for this study. With a definition too broad, it will be extremely difficult to locate the instances of wordplay in the source text and to draw the line at what counts as wordplay and what does not. In the words of Dirk Delabastita: “[w]hen attempting to describe how wordplay is translated one obviously needs to rely on an operational definition of the pun, including criteria for describing and comparing puns in terms of (say) their formal structure, semantic structure, underlying linguistic mechanism, textual function, and / or any other aspect deemed relevant to the comparison” (1997, 208).

As pointed out by Leppihalme (1997, 142), wordplay can be based on several different features of the language(s) involved. These features are pronunciation, spelling,

morphology, vocabulary or syntax. In *The Simpsons*, the wordplay occurs mostly on the level of individual words rather than on the level of phrases or sentences.

The following definition of wordplay by Dirk Delabastita is used for the purposes of this study:

"Wordplay is the general name for the various *textual* phenomena in which *structural features* of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a *communicatively significant confrontation* of two (or more) linguistic structures with *more or less similar forms* and *more or less different meanings*" (1996, 128; emphasis original).

Leppihalme (1997) considers Delabastita's above definition to be quite loose, and one can't argue against the fact that it does comprise quite a broad range of phenomena. It is, however, quite impossible to come up with an exhaustive definition for the concept of wordplay, and as this definition covers the wordplay found in *The Simpsons* very well, it is used for the purpose of this study.

A final note regarding the definition of the term wordplay: there is some variation in the way scholars use the terms *pun* and *wordplay*. Some scholars (like Leppihalme 1997) treat puns as a separate subcategory of wordplay, whereas others (like Delabastita 1996 and Redfern 1985) use the two abovementioned terms interchangeably. The latter approach is adopted in this study.

2.2 *The Simpsons* as a polysemiotic text

Delabastita (1996) emphasises the fact that wordplay is a textual phenomenon. This refers to the fact that language is full of “potential ambiguities and associations” (1996, 129) that in normal situations of language use are not regarded as such: the ambiguity and associative power of wordplay has to be evoked by the surrounding textual environment (context). It must also be noted that these contexts can be verbal or situational. “Verbal contexts follow from our expectation of grammatical well-formedness ... and of thematic coherence” (1996, 129). The expectation of grammatical well-formedness means that “the fact that certain word-classes are normally used in certain syntactic positions only will tend to block a reading of *can* as a verb in a phrase like 'can of lager'” (1996, 129). Thematic coherence refers to the fact that the reader will look for “‘threads’ of meaning that connect words and phrases” (1996, 129).

In multimedia texts (such as *The Simpsons*) the image and (non-verbal) sound are part of the situational context. As Delabastita points out, situational contexts play a crucial role in the functioning of the pun in multimedia texts, with the visual image often eliciting “the secondary meaning of the accompanying verbal text” (1996, 129). Henrik Gottlieb uses the term *polysemiotic* to refer to these texts in which “...two or more simultaneous channels of discourse interact to create the text in question” (2004, 80). In television, the situational context is created simultaneously by four channels of discourse: picture, written text, dialogue and music/sound effects. In Gottlieb’s words: “The intended effect of wordplay can accordingly be conveyed through dialogue (incl. intonation and other prosodic features), through dialogue combined with non-verbal visual information, or through written text on the screen...” (1997, 210). This of course presents more challenges to the translators of multimedia texts, who in the case of television programmes are the subtitlers. Consider the following example that illustrates the complicated web of semiotic layers in *The Simpsons*. This example is from season 18, an episode titled *Stop or my dog will shoot*.

(1) The Simpsons are attending a harvest festival and the family have decided to try and find their way through a cornfield maze, the “amazing maize maze”. The other family members have found their way out of the maze, but Homer is still inside. Night has already fallen and the police have come over to help Homer. They have brought a trail dog along.

CHIEF WIGGUM: Say hello to officer Jaws.

CONSTABLE LOU: Chief, I’m afraid officer Jaws is guilty of *littering*.
And here’s the *litter*.

[Constable Lou presents officer Jaws’s litter of puppies.]



Figure 1 Image and non-verbal sound eliciting the wordplay

Here the creators of *The Simpsons* are playing with the homonymy of the word *litter* as in garbage and as in the offspring of a dog. The image of the dog’s litter, as well as the sound of the barking puppies elicits the secondary meaning of the word *litter*.

2.3. Typology of wordplay

In this chapter I will present a typology of wordplay. As mentioned earlier, there are many ways to define the concept of wordplay, and therefore there are also numerous different typologies of wordplay. For this study the typology is naturally defined by the types of wordplay that are included in the corpus and so a definition is chosen that will best fit the types of wordplay in *The Simpsons*. I chose to operate with the typology of wordplay by Delabastita (1996) with a slight modification. In addition to the four types of wordplay - *homonymy*, *homophony*, *homography* and *paronymy* - in Delabastita's definition, there are two additional types of wordplay in the corpus: *intertextual wordplay* (Leppihalme 1997) and *portmanteau* (Nash 1985). In the following, I will first introduce the four types of wordplay in Delabastita's definition. All of these four types of wordplay contrast "linguistic structures with different meanings on the basis of their formal similarity" (Delabastita 1996, 128). At the end of the chapter I will present the remaining two types of wordplay, *intertextual* wordplay and *portmanteau* words.

2.3.1 Homography

Homography describes the situation when two words are spelled identically but there is a difference in sound.

Consider example (2) of homography in *The Simpsons*. This example is from season 12, an episode titled *HOMR*:

(2) Homer tries his luck at the stock market and as a result loses a large amount of the family's funds. Homer and Marge try to figure out what to do.

HOMER: I have a great way to solve our money woes. You rent your womb to a rich childless couple. If you agree, signify by getting indignant.

MARGE: Are you crazy? I'm not going to be a surrogate mother.

HOMER: C'mon, Marge, we're a team. It's [*uter-US*], not [*uter-YOU*].

In example three the words uterus (womb) and uter-US are homographs. If they were to be spelled, their spelling would be identical. Homer here pronounces the word so that it suits his purposes better. In Homer's version, the word contains the pronoun *us*.

2.3.2 Homonymy

Homonymy refers to the situation where two words have the same sound and spelling but there is a difference in meaning. Consider example (3) of homonymy in *The Simpsons*. This example is from season twelve, an episode titled *Skinner's sense of snow*.

(3) The pupils of Springfield elementary school are trapped inside the school because of a blizzard. Principal Skinner, whose authority is called into question among the children, attempts to keep the situation under control by using military tactics.

PRINCIPAL SKINNER: Children, *stand down!*

[The children stand at attention.]

PRINCIPAL SKINNER: I said *stand down!*

[The children make attempts at standing upside down.]

The writer(s) of this particular scene are playing with the verb *stand down*, which means '(cause to) come off duty; (cause to) relax after a state of alert' (Brown 1993, 3027). The children mistake Skinner's words to mean 'to stand at attention' and as doing that does not seem to satisfy him they make attempts at standing upside down instead.

A note on the distinction between homonymy and polysemy: as Leppihalme (1997, 150) points out, two words that have identical spelling and sound can be considered homonyms or polysemes. Homonyms are words which, despite their identical sound and spelling, are different in meaning. With polysemes, the distinction in meaning is more subtle: one and the same word has gained new meanings for example as a metaphor (like in *hands* (as in part of the body) and *hands of time* (metaphor)) or in the difference between concrete and abstract (like in the verbs *construct* (a house) and *construct* (a meaning)). In this study, no distinction is made between homonyms and polysemes, but all instances of words with identical spelling and sound are considered to be homonyms.

2.3.3 Homophony

Homophony occurs when two words have identical sounds but are spelled in a different way. Example (4) serves as an example of homophony in *The Simpsons*. This example is from season 18, an episode titled *Stop or my dog will shoot*.

(4) The Simpsons are at a harvest festival held in Springfield. They walk around the carnival area. At the edge of a cornfield there is a sign that says:

The *a-maize-ing*

MAIZE MAZE

“Betchacan't solve our *maze!*”

Here the writers of the episode play on the homophony of the words maize and maze. The word maize is also embedded in a new version of the word 'amazing' as *a-maize-ing*, making the two words homophones as well.

2.3.4 Paronymy

In paronymy two words share close resemblance, but there are slight differences in both spelling and sound. Consider example (5) from season 15, an episode titled *'Tis the fifteenth season.*

(5) Homer is suffering from insomnia. He is lying on the sofa, watching television. Soon he falls asleep and starts having nightmares. He sees his own tombstone on the television screen with the following text engraved on it:

“Homer Simpson, unloved by *All*”

[Homer reads the text aloud, horrified.]

HOMER: Homer Simpson, unloved by *Al*, no!

[Homer notices that he misread the engraving the first time and reads it aloud again, this time correctly.]

HOMER: Homer Simpson, unloved by *All*, no!

Here the writers are playing with the paronymy between the pronoun *all* and the proper name *Al* (as in Albert).

Delabastita (1996) also distinguishes between *horizontal* and *vertical* wordplay. In horizontal wordplay, repetition of the formally similar linguistic structure in a certain context triggers the ‘other’ meaning. In example (5) above, the repetition of Principal Skinner’s words ‘stand down’ (as well as the action performed by the children) triggers the wordplay. In vertical wordplay, both meanings of a certain linguistic structure are exposed in one glimpse. The next example (example 6) of vertical wordplay is from season 12, the episode titled *Skinner’s sense of snow.*

(6) The children have taken Principal Skinner hostage and are playing havoc with the school's permanent records. Skinner is tied up in an office chair but tries to reason with the children and tell them to stop what they are doing.

BART: [Spinning Principal Skinner around in the chair] Quiet, Principal *Spinner!*

Here, *Spinner* is a paronymy of the word *Skinner*. Both meanings are exposed in one glimpse, as Bart utters the word *Spinner* and simultaneously spins Principal Skinner in his chair.

2.3.5 Intertextual wordplay

According to Leppihalme, an intertextual wordplay is based on a readily available phrase (like a verse, advertising slogan, proverb, the name of a book or film etc). The phrase on which the wordplay is based on is called a frame (1997, 141). In *The Simpsons*, the instances of intertextual wordplay are often based on songs, familiar sayings or famous public speeches given by politicians, like in the following example (example 7) from season 14, the episode *Old Yeller-belly*:

(7) The Simpsons' cat, Snowball, has rescued Homer from a threatening fire. As a result, Snowball is declared a hero in Springfield. Mayor Quimby gives a speech:

MAYOR QUIMBY: Today I can truly say: *Ich bin ein feline.*

In this instance of intertextual wordplay, the writers of the scene play with the words *Ich bin ein Berliner* uttered by President John F. Kennedy in West Berlin in 1963. *Feline* in Quimby's version of the phrase refers, of course, to cats.

2.3.6 Portmanteaux

Finally, there is a type of wordplay in *The Simpsons* that is called *portmanteaux* by Walter Nash (1985). Although portmanteaux are not a very frequent occurrence in *The Simpsons*, there nevertheless are three occurrences of them in the corpus so there is a need for this category of wordplay as well.

As Nash (1985) points out, the concept of *portmanteau* was originally developed by Lewis Carroll. It is "...a label for the coinage that packs two meanings into one word" (1985, 143). Nash presents examples of this category of wordplay Carroll's book *Through the Looking Glass*. In a poem called 'Jabberwocky' the words 'flimsy' and 'miserable' are made into a portmanteau, *mimsy*. Consider example 8 of portmanteau in the Simpsons. This example is from season 16, an episode titled *Mommie beerest*.

(8) The Simpsons are having brunch at a fancy restaurant. Bart and Lisa are making a scene by shouting and throwing different items of food at each other.

HOMER: I've never been so embarrassed. And the worst part is, this is brunch. So you've ruined two meals. I'll see you at *lupper*.

The word *brunch* is a word that has been formed by the word formation process called blending, where parts of two words are combined to make up a new word. Brunch is a blend of two words: *breakfast* and *lunch*. In Homer's coinage, *lupper*, the portmanteau is a combination of the words *lunch* and *supper*. Homer, disappointed at the fact that Bart and Lisa ruined two meals, plans to have two meals in the evening as well. This is the reason for Homer's coinage.

3. FUNCTIONS OF WORDPLAY

Wordplay captures the reader's attention because it stands out from the surrounding textual environment. Often the function of wordplay in a text is to amuse the person(s) reading the text, namely by producing humour.

The function of wordplay is not always to amuse, however. As Delabastita (1996) points out, in addition to producing humour, possible functions of wordplay include "adding to the thematic coherence of the text,..., forcing the reader/listener into greater attention, adding persuasive force to the statement, deceiving our socially conditioned reflex against sexual and other taboo themes, and so forth" (1996, 129-130). Leppihalme points out that in addition to its function as benevolent humour, wordplay may also convey biting parody, irony or subversiveness with a certain person or phenomenon becoming the laughing stock (1997, 141; my translation).

In *The Simpsons* wordplay is indeed often harnessed in the function of a sort of rebellion against different phenomena. This is in fact one of the profound reasons for why *The Simpsons* is so popular amongst its adult audience. Consider example 9 of a double reading from season twelve, from the episode *Tennis the Menace*.

(9) Bart and Marge have taken part in a tennis tournament. Upon returning home they report their success to Homer. They have been asked to take part in another tennis tournament.

MARGE: It's for charity. It benefits victims of balcony collapse.

BART: We can wipe out *BC* in our lifetime.

Homer: I don't care about *BC*. I care about M.E. – My Enjoyment!

This is one of the cases where the reading of the text depends very much on the reader. The abbreviation *BC* can be read innocently as an acronym of the word balcony collapse, earlier mentioned by Marge. The interpretation that the more mature audience can make, however, is that this acronym refers to quite another matter: birth control, one of the most contested issues in American politics. In recent years, there has been some

debate regarding the promotion of family planning and birth control in the schools in the United States. This can perhaps be taken to refer to that issue, with Homer being the mouthpiece of many young (male) people engaging in sexual relationships for the first time.

In the above example, Homer is represented as the bad example, and his comment as a concrete example of the attitude (young) people should *not* have towards their responsibility in sexual relationships. Puns can indeed be used for educational purposes as well. One of the reasons for the use of wordplay in texts is getting the readers of the text to think. Redfern discusses the motivation behind puns and states that often, in instances of deliberate ambiguity, there is a “strong dose of pedagogical intent present ... the desire to put the receiver to work” (1985, 40).

4. PUNS IN TRANSLATION

4.1 The notion of ‘untranslatability’

In the words of Esko Vertanen: In all fields of translation, the translator should stay faithful to the source language message and try his/her best to convey the original style and atmosphere of it (2007,132; my translation). What makes wordplay particularly challenging for a translator is the fact that it employs particular structural characteristics of the source language for its meaning and effect. For these structural characteristics, it is often impossible to find a counterpart in the target language.

Delabastita discusses the ‘untranslatability’ of wordplay in two of his articles from the years 1994 and 1996. He points out that “focusing on wordplay and ambiguity as facts of the source text and/or the target text, we may be tempted to say that wordplay and translation form an almost impossible match, whichever way one looks at it” (1996, 133). Indeed, the translator often has to “...depart from source text structures for the sake of recreating certain effects” (1994, 229). With wordplay translation this can mean for example that an ‘untranslatable’ pun in the source text is replaced with another one that will work in the target language. Delabastita points out that these translation shifts will often affect also the wider textual environment, “when a new textual setting needs to be created for the target-text wordplay to come to life” (1996, 135).

This results in the fact that the requirements of (formal) translation equivalence are rarely met, and provides an explanation as to why wordplay is sometimes deemed ‘untranslatable’. However, as expecting subtitles to conform to the requirements of formal equivalence is simply not very realistic, wordplay can be considered successfully translated if the target text manages to produce the same effect in the target audience as the source text produced in the original receptors of the message - this would mean that the target text is a functional equivalent of the source text. In the case of translating a multimedia text like *The Simpsons*, the ‘effect’ caused by the target text is often the amusement caused by the humour or the intellectual satisfaction caused by recognising instances of wordplay.

Judging the ‘effect’ a certain text has on its recipients is not an easy task. As pointed out by Adrian Futes Luque (2003), there has been very little investigation in the field of

translation studies into how texts are received and perceived. Luque himself conducted a study on the translation of humour, allusions, puns, proper names and songs, in which he empirically studied the source and target culture viewers' responses to a ten-minute fragment of a Marx Brothers film. It would be an interesting idea to investigate the viewer responses of a source and target audience of *The Simpsons* as well, but that, being a very time-consuming investigation, is out of the scope of this study. In this study, the intended effect of each instance of wordplay is judged subjectively only by myself.

4.2 First step: recognition of wordplay

What is demanded then of a translator who comes across instances of wordplay and then has to render the wordplay into another language? The first requirement is obvious: the person coming across wordplay must be competent enough in the language in question to be able to recognize the verbal message in question as an instance of wordplay. As stated by Delia Chiaro, to be recognized, the wordplay “has to play on knowledge which is shared between sender and recipient” (1992, 11). Gottlieb points out that on television, wordplay may be *text-internal*, which means that it can refer to anything “which is said, or shown/written on the screen” or *text-external*, which means that it can refer to “knowledge of people, social events, cultural institutions, etc. that the audience may possess prior to viewing the programme” (1997, 210-211). So, in addition to the obvious demand that one has to understand the language in which the wordplay occurs, one has to possess enough sociocultural knowledge to be able to recognize instances of wordplay. A third system is also at play when it comes to recognizing instances of wordplay in the source text. Chiaro states that one also has “to be able to recognize broken (or merely bent) linguistic rules, and therefore a high standard of proficiency in the language in which the joke is delivered is essential” (1993, 13). Chiaro calls this the “poetic competence” (1992, 13) of language. What is interesting regarding translation is that a translator has to possess this three-dimensional competence in both the source and target languages.

Often the question of recognizing wordplay is present especially in the case of intertextual wordplay, presented in chapter 2. Leppihalme (1996) discusses the problem of recognizing instances of wordplay in her article “Caught in the Frame. A Target-Culture Viewpoint on Allusive Wordplay” from the year 1996. She states that “a translator can choose among a wide range of translation methods when translating

wordplay. But in order to select one of these methods, or even to start contemplating what might be at stake in a given choice, he or she will have to identify the instances of source-text wordplay in the first place“ (1997, 141). When studying the translation of wordplay in *The Simpsons*, I found out that one indeed has to possess an extraordinarily good knowledge of the source language (including different dialects and sociolects) and a broad knowledge on various aspects of American culture to notice the instances of wordplay. I myself have studied English on university-level for several years, and yet, some of the instances of wordplay escaped me until the second viewing of certain episodes.

Example 10 here serves to demonstrate an instance of wordplay that is very culture-specific in nature and that I dare say will be missed by most or at least many of the Finnish viewers of *The Simpsons*. This example is from season 13, an episode titled *Old man and the key*. This episode is not included in the corpus for this study because the number of wordplay instances in it is so low but I decided to include this example in my thesis anyway, because it demonstrates the occasional culture-specificity of wordplay so well.

(10) Grandpa Simpson’s newly found lover, Zelda, has deserted grampa and traveled to Branson, Missouri with her new boyfriend. Grandpa, hoping to win Zelda back, is trying frantically to find her. The Simpson family is trying to find grampa. They have driven hundreds of miles and have now arrived at what seems to be Branson, Missouri.

HOMER: [Stepping out of the bus] Hello *Branson*, Missouri!

PASSER-BY: This is *Bronson*, Missouri.



Figure 2 The town of Bronson

In this example, Luhtanen has translated the source text wordplay by leaving it in the same form in the target text. When watching this episode of *The Simpsons*, I recognized the above example as an instance of wordplay because of the very similar forms of the two linguistic structures *Branson* and *Bronson*, but I had to check the meaning of *Bronson* to understand the meaning of this instance of wordplay. (There is a town called Bronson in the USA, but that provided no explanation to the meaning of this instance of wordplay). However, I soon found the answer in the internet movie database, where the actor Charles Bronson is described as “an archetypical screen tough guy with weather-beaten features”. In the above scene from *The Simpsons*, every male resident of Bronson, Missouri, is a therefore a ‘Bronson’. An average Finnish viewer of *The Simpsons* probably realizes that there is some type of joke at play here, but the deeper meaning of the wordplay probably escapes most of them.

4.3 Translation strategies for wordplay

Delabastita (1996) has presented a range of translation methods for the translation of wordplay. These methods make it possible for the source text wordplay to gain new life in the target text for example through a related rhetorical device like alliteration or referential vagueness. Delabastita's translation strategies include some relatively 'radical' translation methods like omitting the portion of the text containing the pun, or adding totally new textual material that compensates for the lost source-text puns somewhere

else in the target text. In Delabastita's words, sometimes "...the only way to be faithful to the original text (i.e. to its verbal playfulness) is paradoxically to be unfaithful to it (i.e. to its vocabulary and grammar)" (1996, 135).

Delabastita (1996) has presented the following translation methods for wordplay.

"PUN -> PUN: the source-text pun is translated by a target-language pun, which may be more or less different from the original wordplay in terms of formal structure, semantic structure, or lexical function

PUN -> NON-PUN: the pun is rendered by a non-punning phrase which may salvage both senses of wordplay but in a non-punning conjunction, or select one of the senses at the cost of suppressing the other; of course, it may also occur that both components of the pun are translated 'beyond recognition'

PUN -> RELATED RHETORICAL DEVICE: the pun is replaced by some wordplay-related rhetorical device (repetition, alliteration, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony, paradox, etc.) which also aims to recapture the effect of the source-text pun

PUN -> ZERO: the portion of text containing the pun is simply omitted

PUN ST = PUN TT: the translator reproduces the source-text pun and possibly its immediate environment in its original formulation, i.e. without actually 'translating' it

NON-PUN -> PUN: the translator introduces a pun in textual positions where the original text has no wordplay, by way of compensation to make up for source-text puns lost elsewhere, or for any other reason

ZERO -> PUN: totally new textual material is added, which contains wordplay and which has no apparent precedent or justification in the source text except as a compensatory device

EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES: explanatory footnotes or endnotes, comments provided in translator's forewords, the anthological presentation of different, supposedly complementary solutions to one and the same source-text problem, and so forth" (1996, 134)

There might be some preferences as to the 'legitimacy' of certain translation strategies over others. It can be said that if wordplay is omitted altogether in the target text, the viewing experience of the target audience is not the same as that of the source audience. It may also be argued that the best possible solution is to render wordplay as wordplay whenever possible. This is also pointed out by Gottlieb (1997), who says that "loss of wordplay is easily felt as a loss of the very cause of laughter" (1997, 216). However, sometimes the use of another translation method that aims to recapture the humour in the source text may be considered as a good solution as well. This is accepted by Gottlieb, who points out that "in a few situations even non-wordplay – e.g. the use of non-punning jokes – may trigger the desired effect in the audience, and thus fulfil the function of the original wordplay" (1997, 216).

4.4 Subtitling wordplay

In Finland the translation of foreign TV-programmes and films is usually done with the use of subtitles. Subtitles convey the verbal information available in the dialogue by means of written captions in the target language presented on the screen. Because one subtitle block can only have a limited amount of characters in it (in Finland approximately 30) and can only be on screen for a limited amount of time, it is clear that this mode of translation poses some challenges that are not present in most of the other modes of translation. Esko Vertanen discusses subtitling and points out that the translator often has to make somewhat radical decisions when condensing the spoken words of the person speaking into one or two lines of written text. He goes on to say: The subtitles can only be correctly understood when they are presented on the screen at exactly the right moment, so that the viewer has enough time to read them and knows whose speech they represent (2001, 132; my translation). The subtitler faces enormous challenges as s/he has to be able to translate every imaginable style of speech (like different dialects) and maintain all the necessary information needed for the understanding of the dialogue, at the same time maintaining the original style and atmosphere of the programme. Most of the time there simply is not enough space to include a translation of all the information available for the source text viewers and the

subtitler is faced with the decision of what to leave out of the subtitles. Some of the information prominent in the dialogue simply is more important than other, when it comes to for example the plot development of a film or television series. With regard to subtitling wordplay, it must also be noted that not all the translation methods for wordplay presented by Delabastita are available for the subtitler to use: it is not possible for the subtitler to use editorial techniques and often it is not possible to omit the portion of text that contains the wordplay either (at least not in cases where the subtitles are translations of what is said in the dialogue). There is a possibility to use a translator's note, but in practice, as it is vary rarely used in subtitles it is not conventional and therefore not really an option.

The challenging nature of subtitling as translation has been discussed by scholars, e.g. Gottlieb (1997, 2004) with special reference to subtitling wordplay. Gottlieb points out the following about the challenges/constrictions of subtitling as a form of translation: "first, there is the gap between two groups of recipients...", namely the viewers in the source culture and the viewers in the target culture. Gottlieb goes on to say that "the second gap is between the two modes of reception involved: listening to the dialogue in your native tongue vs. reading your native language while listening to the original dialogue" (1997, 211). The translator has to translate what s/he considers the most essential information from what Gottlieb calls "the polysemiotic symphony of television comedy" and the subtitle "has to sound right, yet be endowed with the same semantic and deictic power as the lines spoken and still heard". This is what Gottlieb refers to as "probably the most challenging hurdle in subtitling wordplay" (2004, 57).

The fact that the original source language message is also available for the viewers of a subtitled television programme can add to the translators' 'burden' in another way as well. As Gottlieb points out, "subtitling is an *overt* type of translation which, by retaining the original version, lays itself bare to criticism from everybody with the slightest knowledge of the source language. At the same time, subtitles are fragmentary in that they only represent the lexical and the syntactic features of the dialogue...The audience will have to turn to the original acoustic and visual clues in trying to grasp the meaning behind the words of the subtitles" (2004, 20).

The fact that the original audio track is available for the source text viewers also results in the fact that the target language audience may notice if the translator has not managed to translate something humorous or amusing into the target language. This is the case

especially when the original programme has a laugh track. *The Simpsons*, however, does not have one, and so some of the humorous quips or instances of wordplay may very well pass by unnoticed by the Finnish-speaking viewers of the series.

5. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter, quantitative data on the wordplay found in the corpus is presented. In the diagrams, the percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.

5.1 Wordplay in the corpus

The following figure (Figure 3) presents the number of times each of the six types of wordplay, homography, homonymy, homophony, paronymy, intertextual wordplay and portmanteau, occurred in the nine episodes of *The Simpsons* in the corpus. The relative popularity of each type of wordplay will also be presented.

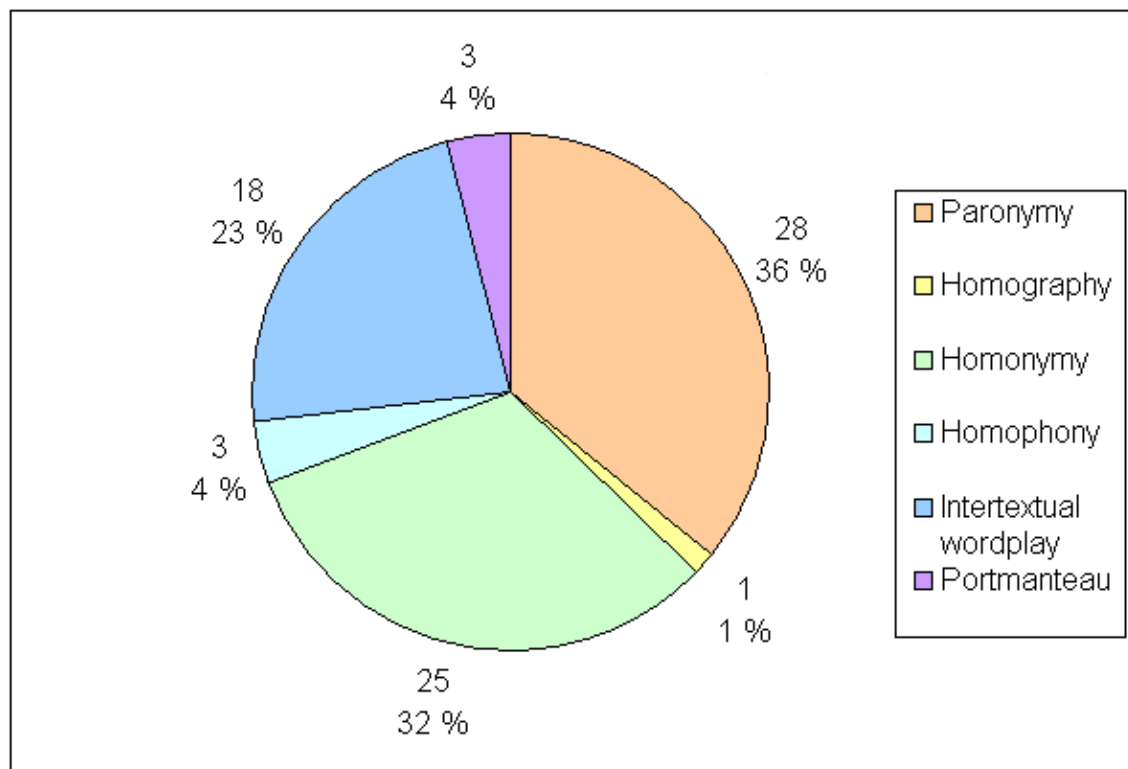


Figure 3 Types and number of occurrences of wordplay in the corpus

As Figure 3 shows, a total number of 78 instances of wordplay were found in the nine episodes of *The Simpsons*. The type of wordplay with the highest amount of occurrences is paronymy, with the 28 occurrences amounting to 36% of the cases. Homonymy has the second highest relative popularity with the 25 occurrences amounting to 32% of the instances of wordplay. The third most common type of wordplay was intertextual wordplay with 18 instances (23% of the cases). Homophony, portmanteau and

homography are all in the minority: there are three cases of homophony (four %), three cases (four %) of portmanteau and one case (one %) of homography in the corpus.

5.2 Categories of wordplay in each episode of *The Simpsons*

Figure 4 provides the breakdown of the six wordplay categories in each of the nine episodes of *The Simpsons*. The length of the column indicates the total number of instances of wordplay per episode. The absolute number of each category of wordplay is shown separately.

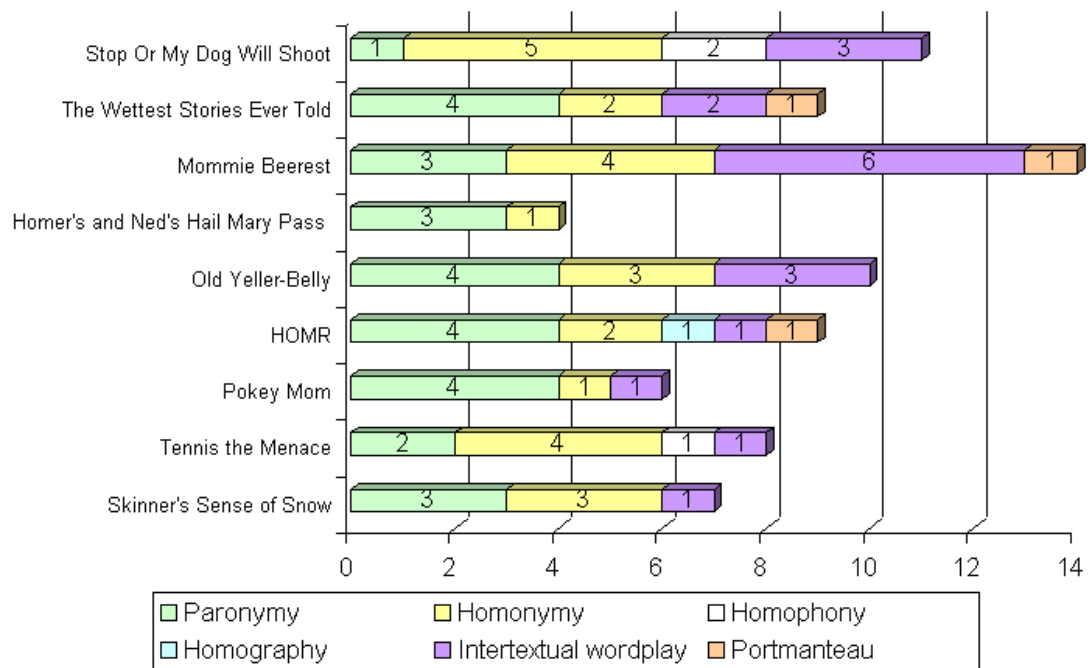


Figure 4 Breakdown of categories of wordplay per episode

As can be seen from the breakdown, the number of wordplay occurrences per episode varied between four and fourteen, so there are substantial differences regarding the number of wordplay instances per each episode of *The Simpsons* in the corpus. The largest number of instances of wordplay (14 instances) was in the episode titled *Mommie Beerest* from the sixteenth season, and the smallest number (four instances) in the episode titled *Homer and Ned's Hail Mary Pass*, also from season 16. As mentioned before, as I started to look for the material for this study I noticed that wordplay is more common in the later seasons of *The Simpsons* than the first ones. Although it is true that the number of wordplay occurrences in the episodes of *The Simpsons* from the first seasons (not included in the corpus) is quite low, the number of the season does not play a significant role regarding the amount of wordplay in the episodes of *The Simpsons* included in the corpus, as is shown by the fact that the episode with the highest amount of wordplay as well as the episode with the lowest amount of wordplay are both from the same season.

5.3 Translation strategies used by Sari Luhtanen

Figure 5 shows the number of times and the relative popularity of each of Delabastita's translation methods for wordplay used by Sari Luhtanen. Note that editorial techniques are not included in the statistics, as in practice they are not available for the subtitler to use. Two methods in Delabastita's categorisation, zero ->pun and non-pun->pun, do not appear in the statistics either, because they were not used by Luhtanen in the nine episodes of *The Simpsons* included in the corpus. The number of translation strategies is 79 (there are 78 instances of wordplay in the corpus), which is due to the fact that one instance of wordplay (a case of homonymy) occurred twice in one episode of *The Simpsons* and was translated two times, each time with a different strategy.

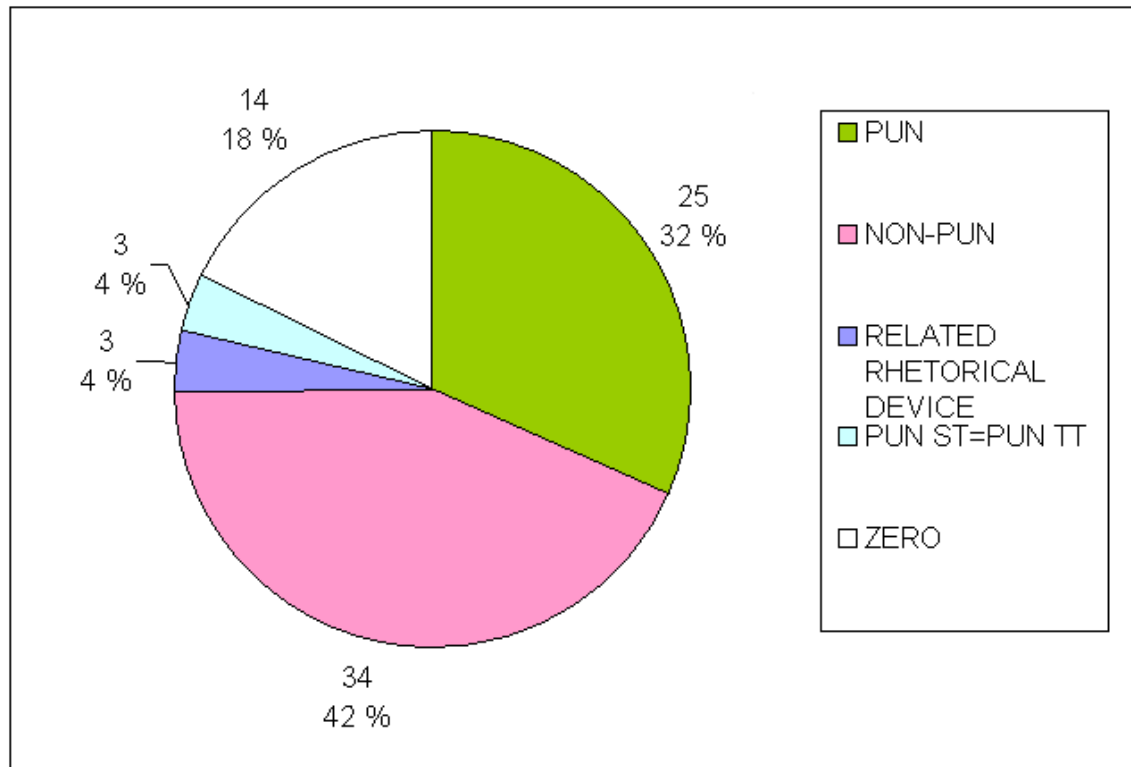


Figure 5 Translation strategies used in the corpus

As can be seen from Figure 5, the strategy most often used by Luhtanen is translating source-text puns with non-puns (34 instances and 42 per cent of the cases). The second most often used strategy is rendering puns as puns, which Luhtanen does in 25 instances of wordplay, which is 32 per cent of the instances of wordplay. The pun was omitted in the target text in 18 per cent of the cases (14 instances). In four per cent of the cases (three instances) a related rhetorical device was used to render the pun in the target text and in four per cent of the cases (three instances) the pun was present in the target text in a similar form as in the source text.

5.4 Translation strategies used for each wordplay category

The following figure (Figure 6) provides the breakdown on how often each of Delabastita's translation methods was used as a translation strategy for each of the six categories of wordplay in the corpus.

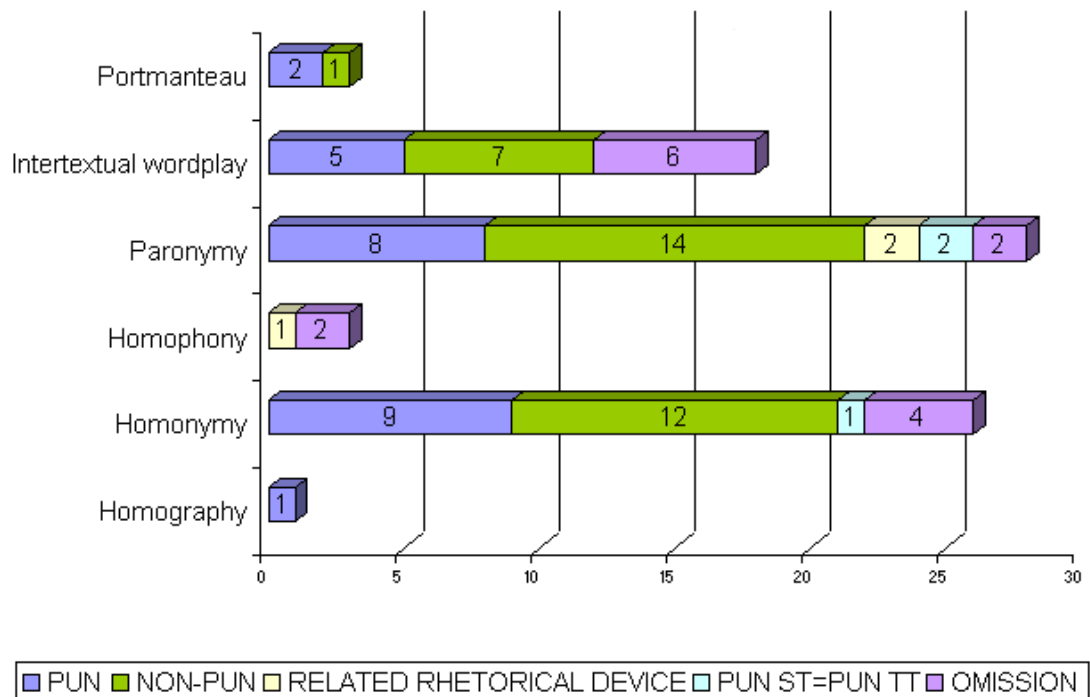


Figure 6 Luhtanen's use of Delabastita's translation methods for each wordplay category

As it can be seen from Figure 6, Luhtanen has been most successful in retaining homonymic wordplay in the subtitles of *The Simpsons*. In nine cases of homonymy out of 26 (35 percent of the cases of homonymy), Luhtanen has rendered the source text homonymy by a pun in the target text. (As pointed out above, actually there were 25 different instances of homonymy in the corpus, with one instance of homonymy occurring twice). With regard to paronymy, Luhtanen was quite successful in retaining instances of it in the subtitles as well. In eight cases out of 28 (29 percent of the cases of paronymy), Luhtanen has rendered paronymy in the source-text by wordplay in the target text. The success rate is almost as high with intertextual wordplay, with as many as five instances out of 18 (28 per cent) rendered by puns in the subtitles. With regard

to those types of wordplay that were less frequent in *The Simpsons*, the one and only case of homography was rendered by a pun in the subtitles, and in two cases out of the three instances of portmanteau a pun was used as a translation strategy.

As can be seen from Figure 5, presented above, the translation strategy of non-pun was used in approximately 32 per cent of the instances of wordplay in the corpus. This strategy was used most often for paronymy. In 14 instances out of 28 (50 per cent of the instances of paronymy), Luhtanen rendered an instance of paronymy with a non-pun in the subtitles. Homonymy was translated with a non-pun in 12 cases out of 26, so this strategy was used in 46 per cent of the instances of homonymy. Intertextual wordplay was rendered as a non-pun in 7 instances out of 18 (39 per cent). One occurrence (33 per cent) of portmanteau was rendered by a non-pun in the subtitles.

Although it can be seen from the breakdown that Luhtanen uses the translation strategy of non-pun quite often (in 42 per cent of the cases of wordplay), this by no means results in the loss of functional equivalence, namely that the humorous nature of *The Simpsons* should be lost. In many cases where Luhtanen uses non-puns in the translation, she nevertheless produces humorous subtitles, although the humour does not occur in the form of wordplay. The use of a non-pun as a translation strategy is by no means comparable to omission.

As can be seen from Figure 5, 17 per cent of the wordplay in *The Simpsons* was omitted altogether from the subtitles. This means that in 14 instances out of the total of 78 cases of wordplay present in the nine episodes in the corpus Luhtanen has not retained the wordplay in any form in the target text. From this it can be concluded that the omission rate is not very high. Luhtanen has a tendency not to translate the (non-essential) information that occurs merely on the verbal visual channel, and for example all of the intertextual puns omitted from the target text (five instances out of 18, that is 28 per cent of intertextual puns) are such cases. (Luhtanen does make some exceptions in this tendency, but only when the written information on the screen is essential for the viewers. This will be discussed further in the next chapter, under 6.2.2.)

Retaining the pun in its original form in the target text is not a translation strategy that Luhtanen uses very often. As can be seen from Figure 5, it is used in four per cent of the instances of wordplay. As can be seen from Figure 6, it is used once with homonymy (four per cent of the cases) and twice with paronymy (seven per cent of the cases). Also

a related rhetorical device is used as a translation strategy in four per cent of the instances of wordplay. It is used twice with paronymy (seven per cent of the cases) and once with homophony (33 per cent of the cases). Examples of Luhtanen's use of different translation strategies in the nine episodes of *The Simpsons* will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Transmitting puns into the target text

In the following, I will present examples of Luhtanen's use of the different translation strategies. Several examples of the use of each translation strategy are presented.

6.1.1 Rendering puns by puns

When looking at the relative popularity of each translation strategy used by Luhtanen, it can be seen that Luhtanen has managed quite well to render the wordplay in *The Simpsons* into Finnish. It can be argued that translating puns with puns is the best possible solution regarding the functional equivalence of the target text to the source text, and in 25 instances out of 78 (32 per cent of the cases) Luhtanen has managed to do that. For example in the following example (example 11), Luhtanen has successfully rendered the source-text pun, in this case paronymy, by a pun in the subtitles. This example is from season 12, the episode titled *Tennis the Menace*.

(11) The Simpsons are at 'The old folks' talent show' at Springfield retirement castle, where Grampa Simpson resides. Grampa has won a prize. A man hands him a gift voucher:

GRAMPA: Wow, a free *auto*!

Finnish subtitle: Vau, ilmainen *auto*!

MAN: Keep reading.

Finnish subtitle: Lue lisää. [Grampa notices that his hand covers part of the text.]

FREE *AUTOPSY*

Ilmainen *autopsia*

The two English words *auto* and *autopsy* as well as the two Finnish words *auto* ('car') and *autopsia* ('autopsy') are here classified as paronyms. Although the paronymy between the words is not 'perfect', the two words are nevertheless classified as paronyms as they would fit the other categories of wordplay in this study even less well. Here, Luhtanen has translated the paronymy in the source text as paronymy in the target

text. It can be said that in this case the wordplay is quite easy to translate, since there really is no other (reasonable) way to translate the above. It does not happen very often that there is a ‘self-evident’ translation strategy available for use however, so this is quite a rare instance.

Luhtanen manages to retain other types of puns as puns in the subtitles as well. In the next example (example 12), Luhtanen retains the source text homonymy as homonymy in the target text. This example is from season 12, the episode titled *Pokey mom*.

(12) The Simpson family went to a prison rodeo where Homer injured his back. He is being treated at the prison hospital.

MARGE: How’s your back, dear?

HOMER: *Can’t complain.*

[Homer indicates a sign on the wall that reads ‘No complaining’.]

This example is quite a rare occurrence in the corpus where the wordplay occurs on the sentence level. The sentence *can’t complain* has two meanings (homonyms). One could assume that Homer utters the words in the meaning ‘My back is better/fine’ but instead, Homer means that he can’t complain because a sign on the hospital wall forbids him to do so. This, too, is an instance of wordplay with a readily available translation.

Luhtanen uses the Finnish sentence *En voi valittaa* (‘I can’t complain’) in a similar, homonymous way as in the source text, and so the homonymy is rendered by homonymy in the target text. If Luhtanen had used the sentence *En saa valittaa* (‘I’m not allowed to complain’), which is another possible Finnish translation for Homer’s utterance, the humour of the original would have been lost.

In the next example (example 13) the intertextual wordplay in the source text is translated with a pun in the target text. This example is from season 14, an episode titled *Old yeller-belly*.

(13) Bart and his friends are up in Bart's tree house. They are having a sing along.

BART AND FRIENDS: *Glory, glory hallelujah. Teacher hit me with a ruler. I cracked her in the bean with a frozen Jimmy Beam and she ain't my teacher no more.*

Finnish subtitle: *Joopa joo, hallelujaa. Maikka löi mua lujaa. Minä heitin nakilla kalloon. Se ei enää maikkani oo!*

In this instance of intertextual wordplay, the frame on which the wordplay is based on is the song *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, an American patriotic anthem that is well-known among Americans. The melody of this song is known even among Finnish people including many children. One version often sung by Finnish children uses the melody from this American patriotic anthem and the following lyrics:

”Pikku-Matin autosta on kumi puhjennut (times three),
purukumilla me paikkasimme sen.”

Luhtanen uses an intertextual pun in her translation as well. She uses cultural adaptation to make the Finnish translation fit the mouths of Bart and his friends. The familiar melody of the original song works in a similar way in both source and target cultures: those who recognize the melody realize that the lyrics of the original song have been replaced with new ones, which makes this an instance of wordplay.

Luhtanen also manages to render an instance of homography by a pun in the target text. An example of this can be found in the episode titled *HOMR* from the twelfth season. This case was already briefly discussed in chapter three as example 4.

HOMER: C'mon Marge, it's *uter-us*, not *uter-you*!

Finnish translation: Tee se *kohtuuden* nimissä.

In Luhtanen's translation, the word *kohtuuden* ('kohtuuden nimissä' means 'be reasonable') is a paronym of the word *kohtu* ('womb') or *kohdun* ('of the womb'). Luhtanen has been very creative to find this solution. Although the wordplay in the target text is slightly different, it is quite similar to the original, and so the viewing experience is very similar for the source and target audiences. In example 14 Luhtanen renders an instance of portmanteau as wordplay in the subtitles.

(14) Homer has become exceptionally intelligent, after a crayon he stuffed into his brain as a child was surgically removed. However, Homer has realized that it is not always easy being smarter than other people. He wants to go back to his old, stupid self.

HOMER: [to the doctors] Change me back to the blissful boob I was.

DOCTOR: We don't play god here.

HOMER: That's ridiculous. You do nothing but play god here. And I'm sure your *octoparrot* would agree. [Indicates to a creature in the laboratory that is half octopus, half parrot.]

Finnish subtitle: Höpsis. Sitähän te teette. Tuo *mustekaija* on samaa mieltä.

Here, Luhtanen has translated an instance of portmanteau in the source text with the same type of wordplay, portmanteau, in the target text. The wordplay in the translation is formed of the two words *muste* (the first word of the compound *mustekala*, 'octopus') and *kaija* (the second word of the compound *papukaija*, 'parrot'). The portmanteau in the source text is formed of the two words *octo* (from *octopus*) and *parrot*. The wordplay is therefore of an almost identical type in the source and target texts.

As can be seen from the examples above, in many instances of wordplay, Luhtanen translates a pun in *The Simpsons* as a similar type of pun in the target text. This happens in 24 instances of the 25 cases where Luhtanen has rendered the pun by a pun. Only one instance remains, where Luhtanen has translated the source text wordplay into a

different type of wordplay in the target text. This case will be presented in the next example (example 15) from the episode *Skinner's sense of snow* from season 12.

(15) The children are trapped inside Springfield elementary school because of a blizzard. Principal Skinner is using military tactics to keep the situation under control. Bart is fed up with the situation and plans to escape.

BART: I'm tired of taking orders from *G.I Jerk*. I'm gonna tunnel out of here.

Finnish subtitle: Olen kyllästynyt tuon *inttihullun* käskyihin. Meikä pakenee.

In this example, *G.I Jerk* is a paronymy of *G.I Joe*, in which *G.I* stands for Government Issued and *Joe* for American male. This name was used in world war one to refer to American soldiers, and is also the name of a line of military- themed action figures for children. In the above example, Bart replaces *Joe* by *Jerk*. In Luhtanen's translation, *inttihullu* (Finnish slang word for *intti* ('army') + *hullu* ('nut')) is a homonym. People who are fanatical admirers of military activities, can be referred to as *inttihullu*. The fact that Principal Skinner is also acting in a not-so-sane manner (like a 'nut') is another possible meaning (homonym) of this word and can also be the reason for Bart giving Skinner this nickname.

6.1.2 Translating puns with the strategy of related rhetorical device

A related rhetorical device is used as a translation strategy by Luhtanen in four per cent of the instances of wordplay. Using this translation strategy, Luhtanen aims to recapture the humour occurring in the source text and often succeeds to do so, even when the original meaning of the wordplay is inevitably lost. In the following example (example 16), Luhtanen uses the repetition of the first part of a Finnish compound noun to render the source text pun into Finnish. This example is from the episode *Tennis the Menace* from season 12.

(16) Krusty the Clown is doing his stand-up comedy act at the halftime of a tennis tournament. He is wearing two normal-sized tennis-rackets as earrings.

KRUSTY: Hey hey, what do you think? I hope I don't get arrested for *racket earring!*

Finnish subtitle: Mitäs pidätte? Toisilla on *pelisilmää*, minulla *pelikorvat!*

Here the word *racket earring* is pronounced similarly to the word *racketeering* (a racketeer is 'a person participating in or operating a dishonest or illegal business' (Brown 1993, 2460)). The two words are homophones. In Luhtanen's translation, the Finnish word *pelisilmä* ('game' + 'eye') refers to someone who 'has an eye for the game'. The word *pelikorva* is not a real Finnish word but a combination of two words: *pele* ('game') + *korva* ('ear'), which refers to the fact that Krusty is wearing tennis rackets in his ears. The original sense of the source text wordplay is lost here, but Luhtanen makes a creative solution and still manages to produce humour in the subtitle.

In the next example (example 17) from the episode *Mommie Beerest* from season 16, Luhtanen translates paronymy in the source text by using a related rhetorical device as a translation strategy.

(17) Marge has suggested to Moe that he could furbish up his bar and change it into a British pub.

MOE: [in song] My pub could be *British* instead of a *piddish*.

Finnish subtitle: Pubini voisi olla *brittityylinen* eikä näin *kuppainen*.

Here Luhtanen has translated the paronymy between the words *British* and *piddish* (defined in Urban dictionary, available on the internet, as ‘a complete loser that has no friends’) with a related rhetorical device, rhyme. End-rhyme occurs with the Finnish words *brittityylinen* (‘in British style’) and *kuppainen* (‘ragged’). Moe sings the above line, so it is natural to use rhyme in the translation, because it is common in many types of songs. Luhtanen’s strategy works quite well with this instance of wordplay.

In the next example (example 18), Luhtanen translates an instance of homonymy with a related rhetorical device. This example is again from season 12, the episode titled *Skinner’s sense of snow*.

(18) When the children realize that they are trapped inside the school they start wondering where all the teachers are.

MILHOUSE: [to principal Skinner] Where are the teachers?

SKINNER: Their union called an emergency caucus.

[The scene shifts to the teachers at their caucus. Wearing ski outfits and holding drinks in their hands, they are dancing in front of the window. A view of snow-topped mountains is seen from the window.]

TEACHERS: [chanting] *Caucas, Caucas, Caucas!*

In this example, the word *Caucas* is a paronym of the word *caucus*. *Caucas* (judged by the view that is seen from the window behind the teachers) here refers to the Caucasus mountains that are sometimes referred to as *Caucas*. Luhtanen has translated this instance of wordplay using the Finnish equivalent for the word *caucus*, ‘*kokous*’. The teachers’ chanting is translated with the repetition of the same word three times. Another solution would have been to translate the teachers’ chanting with the Finnish equivalent for *Caucasus* mountains, namely *Kaukasus* (–*vuoret*), but it would not have been a very good solution. The word *Kaukasus* is not a paronym of *kokous* and it would not seem

natural, as it takes quite a lot longer to say *Kaukasus* than *kokous* three times. As most of the viewers probably miss the wordplay in the source text anyway because the difference in the pronunciation of *caucus* and *Caucas* is so slight, using the word *Kaukasus* in the translation would stand out too much.

6.1.3 Pun in similar form in source and target text

Luhtanen uses the reproduction of the source text wordplay in a similar form in the target text as a translation strategy in three cases (four per cent) of wordplay in the corpus. Not translating the source text pun but retaining it in the similar form in the target text often results from the fact that the source text wordplay is understandable to the target culture viewers in its original form in the target text. Consider example 19 from season 12, an episode titled *HOMR*.

(19) Homer has invested money in the stock market and bought 100 shares of Animotion. He calls in to check the value of his stock.

QUOTER: [on phone, synthetic voice]: For automated stock prices, please state the company name.

HOMER: Animotion

QUOTER: Animotion, up one and one-half.

HOMER: *Yahoo!*

Finnish subtitle: none

QUOTER: *Yahoo*, up six and a quarter.

Finnish subtitle: *Yahoo!*. Noussut 6,25 pistettä.

HOMER: Huh, what is this crap?

In example 19, Homer's exclamation *yahoo* and *Yahoo!* (the internet service provider Yahoo! Inc.) are homonyms. Luhtanen does not translate *yahoo* as Homer's exclamation at all. This is probably because translating it into Finnish could be misleading, as Luhtanen wanted to maintain *Yahoo! (Inc.)* of the source text in the subtitles. (The Finnish equivalent of the outcry *yahoo* is 'Jippii' and as it happens, there is a Finnish internet service provider called *Jippii!*. This could have been used as a translation strategy as well. However, it could be that this would have been counted as product placement (and therefore subliminal advertising, forbidden in television programmes in Finland) or the Finnish company *Jippii!* might not have given permission to use the

company name here. The pronunciation of ‘Jippii’ is also so different from the pronunciation of ‘yahoo’ that the subtitles would lose their subtleness. Retaining the source text wordplay in the same form in the target text works here, as it can reasonably be assumed that Yahoo! Inc. is sufficiently well-known among the Finnish viewers of *The Simpsons* that the wordplay will work in its original form.

Sometimes there are other kinds of reasons for retaining the source text wordplay in its original form. In the next example (example 20), a Finnish pun in the target text simply would not work very well as it would merely confuse the target audience. The child audience is probably also considered here, because if translated into Finnish, the pun would contain sexual connotations and be too strong for children. Example 20 is from season 16, an episode titled *Homer and Ned’s Hail Mary Pass*.

(20) Rod and Todd Flanders (the neighbors of the Simpsons) are watching television. A commercial break is on.

A LITTLE BOY: [in the advertisement, to his grandfather] Grampa, can we go fishing?

GRANDPA: Sorry Jimmy, your grandma and I are going to have old people sex. Thank you, *Jammitin!*

Finnish subtitle: Ukki, vietkö minut kalaan?

– Valitan. Mummisi ja minä aiomme harrastaa vanhusseksiä. Kiitos, *Jammitin!*



Figure 7 – The advertisement for Jammitin

The word *Jammitin* (some type of product used in ‘old people sex’) in the source text is a paronymy of the sentence *Jam it in*, the Finnish translation of which would be ‘Tunge se sisään’. However, if the wordplay was to be translated with this Finnish sentence as

‘Kiitos, Tungeשיםisään!’

it would not make much sense and would therefore stand out too much (and make especially the younger audience wonder about the meaning of this subtitle). In addition to the child audience, also many adults watching this episode of *The Simpsons* would probably be at a loss if Luhtanen had translated the product name into Finnish. As can be seen from Figure 7, a large text that reads “Jammitin” appears at the end of the advertisement. The fact that this text that appears on screen is not translated probably makes it easier for the more mature viewers to understand the original wordplay, and translating the text into Finnish would only be confusing.

6.2 Puns not retained in the subtitles

6.2.1 Rendering puns by non-puns

Luhtanen uses a non-pun as a translation strategy in 34 wordplay instances, which is 42 per cent of the 78 occurrences of wordplay in the corpus. The use of a non-pun in the translation often is not a bad solution regarding the functional equivalence of the target text, because Luhtanen has many times managed to produce humorous subtitles of the source text wordplay despite the fact that the humour is not delivered in the form of wordplay in the subtitles. In the next example (example 21), Luhtanen has translated the portmanteau in the source text so that the original sense of the wordplay is transmitted to the target audience, albeit not in the form of wordplay. This example is from season 17, the episode titled *The Wettest stories ever told*. The episode in question is an anthology show with a nautical theme.

(21) The Simpson family and many other characters from the town of Springfield are on board the Mayflower. To their horror, Reverend Lovejoy and Captain Flandish (Ned Flanders) find numerous passengers in the storage room, drunk out of their wits.

CAPTAIN FLANDISH: [resentfully] Horseplay? Roughhousing?
Horsehousing?

Finnish subtitle: Hevosenleikkiä, pelleilyä, *pelleilevän hevosen leikkikoti?*

[The men are engaging in horseplay and roughhousing, and a horse lies on the floor, inside a small house he does not fit into properly.]



Figure 8 The portmanteau *horsehousing* on the non-verbal visual channel

In example 21, *horsehousing* is a portmanteau of the words *horseplay* ('rough, coarse, or boisterous play, passing the bounds of propriety') and *roughhousing* ('horseplay, boisterous behaviour'). The Finnish words *hevosleikki* ('horseplay') and *pelleily* ('fooling about') are combined into *pelleilevän hevosen leikkikoti* ('a playhouse for the horse that is fooling about') that is not a portmanteau but a good translation in that it retains the original meaning of the source text wordplay.

In the next example (example 22), Luhtanen has been very creative in her translation. In this occurrence of wordplay, the wordplay is rendered by non-wordplay but in such a manner that the viewers may not even notice that something is missing. The example is from the episode *Homer and Ned's Hail Mary pass* from season 16.

(22) The Simpsons are at Springfield park. The park has gotten run down: there is litter here and there, some stray dogs wander the park and homeless people sleep on park benches. Letters are missing from the sign that used to read: “Springfield park. Feel the pride!”

LISA: I used to love Springfield park but it’s gotten so run down.

HOMER: Oh no, the *prid* is gone!

Finnish subtitle: Voi ei, kirjaimet puuttuvat!



Figure 9 The translation of “Oh no, the prid is gone!”

In this instance of wordplay, the *prid* in Homer’s exclamation is a paronymy of the word *pride*. What makes Homer’s remark humorous is the fact that Homer apparently does not realize that there actually is no such word as ‘prid’. He possibly refers to the fact that the pride of Springfield park is indeed gone, but uses the word ‘pride’ in a malformed form, such as it appears on the sign. In Luhtanen’s translation ‘Voi ei, kirjaimet puuttuvat!’ (‘Oh no, the letters are missing!’) Luhtanen makes Homer seem stupid in a slightly different way: from her translation, it becomes obvious that Homer does not really understand what Lisa is talking about, as he seems to consider the missing letters in the sign to be the biggest problem. It would be hard to find a better solution for the translation.

In the next example (example 23), an instance of homonymy is translated with non-wordplay in the target text. This example is from season 12, the episode titled *Skinner's sense of snow*.

(23) There is an old folks' talent show at Springfield retirement castle. It is Jasper's turn to show his talent. An old lady is holding a sign:

“THE AMAZING PLATE-SPINNER”

Finnish subtitle: Hämmästyttävä tekarijonglööri

[Jasper juggles some denture plates on sticks.]

In this instance of wordplay, the words *plate* and denture *plate* are homonyms: instead of using dinner plates, Jasper juggles some denture plates on sticks. In the Finnish translation, Luhtanen uses the word ‘tekarijonglööri’. This is a made-up word (*tekari* is a colloquial form of ‘tekohampaat’ and *jonglööri* means ‘juggler’) that transmits what Jasper is doing very well. ‘Plate-spinner’ could be translated into Finnish as ‘lautastenpyörittäjä’, but it is not an actual Finnish word either and would not explain the original wordplay for the Finnish viewers at all.

An important note on Luhtanen's use of the translation strategy of non-pun is that all of the episode titles in the corpus except for two (*HOMR* from season 12 and *Homer and Ned's Hail Mary Pass* from season 16) are instances of intertextual wordplay, all of which Luhtanen has rendered by non-puns in the Finnish translation. (As was already briefly discussed in the introduction of this study, the original titles of *The Simpsons* episodes are not available to be seen in the episodes themselves, either by the source or by the target audience, but only the production code is displayed in the end credits of each *Simpsons* episode. Luhtanen nevertheless provides a translation for all of the episode titles, which is probably due to practical reasons.) The episode titles of *The Simpsons* pose an extra challenge to the translator, as they often are plays on well-known book or film titles, names of cartoon characters etc but yet they at the same time tell something about the theme of the upcoming *Simpsons* episode. In my opinion it usually is quite impossible to render this complex type of intertextual wordplay as wordplay in the Finnish translation, or at least it would not be reasonable to expect Luhtanen to render the wordplay as wordplay in every single episode title. As there are currently over four hundred *Simpsons* episodes in existence it is possible that Luhtanen has retained the possible wordplay in the original titles in some of the Finnish episode

titles, but that is outside the scope of this study as the corpus consists of only nine episodes.

All of the original episode titles and their Finnish translations are listed in Table 1 on page 8. I will here take a closer look at two of them. The next example (example 24) is from season 16.

(24) Original episode title: Mommie Beerest

Finnish episode title: Margen baari

Here the episode title is a reference to *Mommie Dearest*, a book published in 1978 and written by Christina Crawford about her allegedly alcoholic mother, Joan Crawford. In this *Simpsons* episode, Marge becomes a co-owner of Moe's bar and starts running the bar to protect her investment. Thus the original episode title also tells something about the episode itself. Luhtanen's translation *Margen baari* ('Marge's bar') is a non-pun in which the ambiguity and humour of the original title are unfortunately lost. However, Luhtanen's succeeds in restoring the other function of the original title, namely referring to the theme of the episode in her translation.

The other example (example 25) of Luhtanen's translations of the episode titles is from season 12.

(25) Original episode title: Skinner's Sense of Snow

Finnish title: Lumen tajua

This episode title is a reference to the translated novel and film *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (the original Danish title for this novel by Peter Høeg is *Froken Smillas fornemelse for sne*, published in 1992). In addition to the intertextual wordplay, this episode title again also tells about the theme of the following episode: the *Simpsons* episode *Skinner's Sense of Snow* has a snow theme with Principal Skinner as one of the main characters. Here Luhtanen uses the title of the Finnish translation of Høeg's book, *Lumen tajua* ('sense' or 'understanding' of snow), which works well as it also contains the word snow that refers to the theme of the episode. Some of the Finnish viewers may also notice that Luhtanen uses the Finnish title of Høeg's novel as the episode title, which gives the target culture viewers a similar type of intellectual satisfaction as those source culture viewers who notice the wordplay in the original episode title get.

6.2.2 Omission of puns

The puns are omitted altogether from the subtitles in 14 cases (18 per cent), so less than one fifth of the puns are lost in translation. In the instances of wordplay where the source text wordplay is omitted, the original wordplay sometimes works simultaneously on many levels, and the rendering of the multiple occurrences of wordplay can be considered impossible. Returning to example four that was discussed earlier we see two instances of source text wordplay occurring at the same time.

(24) HOMER: “C’mon Marge, its *uter-us*, not *uter-you*!”

Finnish subtitle: Tee se *kohtuuden* nimissä.

In Homer’s utterance, there are two instances of wordplay: the homograph uterus, [*uter-us*], which also functions as a paronym of *uter-you*. It is virtually impossible to reproduce in the target text this type of wordplay that simultaneously plays on several structural features of the source language. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2 and in section 6.1.1, Luhtanen includes the paronym *kohtuuden nimissä* (meaning ‘be reasonable’, with *kohtuuden* being a paronym of the word *kohdun*, meaning ‘of the womb’) in her translation of the above example. She omits the paronymy present in the source text from the target text. Despite the fact that the paronymy is lost in translation, the subtitle reproduces some of the original humour in the target text, and it would in fact be impossible to reproduce both of the instances of wordplay that occur in the source text.

In another instance, the reason for omitting the source text pun probably is the limited space and time available for the subtitles. Consider example 25 from the episode *Stop or my dog will shoot* from season 18.

(25) The Simpsons are inside the maize maze at the harvest festival and can't find their way out.

MARGE: Maybe we should split up.

Finnish subtitle: Meidän pitää erota.

HOMER: Split up? No, Marge, we can fix this marriage.

Finnish subtitle: Ei. Saamme liiton kuntoon.

MARGE: No, no I didn't mean...

Finnish subtitle: En tarkoittanut...

HOMER: Fine you *want out* ? Then go, I can make it on my own.

Finnish subtitle: Hyvä on. pärjään omillanikin.

In this example, there are two instances of wordplay. The first one is the verb *split up* that is a homonym with the meanings, 'go separately in different directions' and 'divorce each other'. Luhtanen has translated this verb as *erota* ('separate', 'divorce each other'), which has the same two meanings. *Want out* in Homer's utterance *Fine you want out?* is a homonym as well: in this context it can mean either wanting out of the maze or wanting out of Homer and Marge's marriage. Luhtanen's translation of Homer's utterance means simply: 'Fine, I can make it on my own'. An alternative translation of Homer's utterance would be: 'Hyvä on, haluat siis ulos. Pärjään omillanikin', in which 'haluat siis ulos' is a homonym with the meanings 'you want out [of the maze]' and 'you want out [of the marriage]'. This is where the space-and time restrictions of subtitling come into play, however: there simply is not enough space for a subtitle that long. So, Luhtanen has done her best with the available space and produces a translation that nevertheless transmits most of the original meaning albeit one instance of wordplay is lost.

It can be said that Luhtanen generally omits the wordplay (and the verbal information in general) that is only available on the verbal visual channel and has no significance regarding the understanding of the programme (this does not apply to episode titles that were discussed in 6.2.1). An example of this is the following instance (example 26) of wordplay in a sign of a pet shop.

(26) "ALL CREATURES GREAT AND CHEAP"

Finnish subtitle: none

This, of course, is an instance of intertextual wordplay referring to *All Creatures Great and Small*, the compilation of James Herriot's two novels first published in 1972. The sign shows as the Simpsons walk into the store and it is therefore perfectly visible for all viewers. However, the following scene that occurs in the pet shop makes it perfectly clear that the family is in a pet shop so the loss in translation of this instance of wordplay is not essential. The task of the translator is to translate all the essential information, so that all the verbal information important for the viewers is rendered into the target language. In this case, the information omitted is not vital for the viewers. It would also be very difficult to reproduce the source text wordplay. One possible solution would have been to translate the wordplay by modifying the Finnish title of the book, *Kaikenkarvaiset ystäväni* ('all sorts of friends') into for example 'Kaikenhintaiset ystäväni' ('friends from all price ranges'), but my assumption is that many (if not most) of the Finnish viewers miss the original instance of wordplay and consider *All creatures great and cheap* to be just a name for the pet shop, so the loss in translation does not do much harm regarding the functional equivalence of the target text.

Another reason for omitting puns occurring on the verbal visual channel only is the co-occurrence of many instances of wordplay. This happens for example in the next scene, presented in figure 10.



Figure 10 Co-occurrence of multiple instances of wordplay

In Figure 10, there is a total of four instances of intertextual wordplay: The wordplay in *3 fast 3 furious* is based on the movie title '2 fast 2 furious', *Breast Camp* probably is based on the reality TV show 'Boot Camp' and *Dude, Where's My Prostate* on the film 'Dude, Where's My Car'. *Kill Bill Maher* is based on the film title 'Kill Bill', which, with the proper noun *Maher* added, makes up a whole new movie title, *Kill Bill Maher* (Bill Maher is an American comedian). Here, it would be quite impossible for Luhtanen to translate everything occurring at the same time on the verbal visual channel, because all the translations would simply not fit on the screen. Again, the verbal information available to the viewers is not essential, and at least some of the Finnish viewers probably understand the wordplay in its original form, so omitting the translation is not very harmful.

There are instances where the wordplay occurs on the verbal visual channel only, but Luhtanen has nevertheless translated the wordplay. One of these is the instance of homonymy presented in example 23, *The amazing plate-spinner*. In this case, Luhtanen has translated the wordplay. In this scene however, the information is essential for the understanding of what is happening, so it can be considered essential information and therefore it needs to be translated.

7. Concluding remarks

The purpose of this study was to investigate what kind of translation strategies Sari Luhtanen uses to render the abundant wordplay in *The Simpsons* into Finnish. Dirk Delabasita's translation methods for wordplay were used as a frame of reference and a quantitative analysis of Luhtanen's translation strategies as well as the types of wordplay occurring in the corpus was performed.

Analysis of the corpus revealed that Luhtanen uses Delabastita's range of translation methods for wordplay in a versatile manner. The strategy Luhtanen uses most often is rendering the source text puns by non-puns, which she uses in 42 per cent of the cases. However, almost a third (32 per cent) of the wordplay is retained in the target text, and often Luhtanen uses the same type of wordplay in her translation that was used in the source text. In 18 per cent of instances of wordplay Luhtanen omits the wordplay from the subtitles. This happens usually in those cases where the source text wordplay appears merely on the verbal visual channel and does not have vital importance for the viewers regarding the understanding of the programme. Luhtanen uses the translation strategy of related rhetorical device in four per cent and reproducing the source text pun in its original formulation in four per cent of the cases of wordplay, so these two translation strategies are in the minority. Three of Delabastita's translation methods for wordplay (zero->pun, non-pun->pun and editorial techniques) were not used at all by Luhtanen with the instances of wordplay in the corpus, which is not surprising as these three strategies do not really conform to subtitling conventions.

It was illustrated by the numerous examples presented in this study that although Luhtanen retains the puns in the subtitles in only a little less than the third of the instances of wordplay, she nevertheless retains the source text humour in most cases of wordplay in the corpus. Without question it can be said that the loss of wordplay in translation does not mean that the cause of laughter is lost as well. By using different translation strategies and reproducing the humour of the source text, Sari Luhtanen offers the Finnish viewers of *The Simpsons* a very similar viewing experience as the audience in the source culture gets.

In this study only my assessment of Sari Luhtanen's translation strategies for wordplay in *The Simpsons* was used. An interesting idea for further study would be to perform an

empirical study of source and target culture viewers' responses to some episodes of *The Simpsons* that contain instances of wordplay. I hope this study has shed some light on the demanding job Sari Luhtanen does in subtitling *The Simpsons* and showed that although not always in the form of wordplay, it is possible to transmit the source text humour originating in instances of wordplay into the target language.

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