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QUE SERA, QUESADILLA!
Translating puns in *BoJack Horseman*

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Pöyhönen, Ilona: Que sera, quesadilla! Translating puns in *BoJack Horseman*

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Tämä kandidaatintutkielma käsittelee sanaleikkien kääntämistä ja käännösratkaisuja Netflixin alkuperäissarjassa *BoJack Horseman*, joka on aikuisille suunnattu animoitu draamakomedia.

Käytän analyysissani Dirk Delabastitan vuonna 1993 laatimaa teoriaa sanaleikkien käännöstekniikoista, jossa hän erittelee yhdeksän erilaista strategiaa sanaleikkien kääntämiseen

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, kuinka suuri osuus alkuperäisistä sarjan sanaleikeistä säilyy tekstityskäännöksissä. Tämän lisäksi pyrin myös saamaan selville, kuinka paljon eri tekniikoita käytetään suhteessa toisiinsa, kuinka hyvin Delabastitan malli sopii materiaalin käsittelyyn ja onko käännös kokonaisuutena onnistunut.

Kaiken kaikkiaan materiaalista löytyi 97 sanaleikkiä. Käännösratkaisujen prosenttiosuudet jakautuivat seuraavasti: sanaleikki säilyi kohdekielellä (50%), käännös säilytti yhden sanaleikin merkityksistä ilman kohdekielistä sanaleikkiä (28%), alkuperäinen sanaleikki siirrettiin käännökseen sellaisenaan alkuperäiskielellä (9%), sanaleikin molemmat merkitykset käännettiin ilman kohdekielistä sanaleikkiä (7%), sanaleikki käännettiin ilman kohdekielistä sanaleikkiä käyttämällä hyödyksi toista retorista tehokeinoa (5%), ja sanaleikin sisältävä osio poistettiin kokonaan käännöksestä (2%).

Sanaleikki säilyi siis puolessa käännöksistä ja käännös onnistui kaiken kaikkiaan säilyttämään sarjan kielellä leikittelevän luonteen hyvin. Mahdollisia syitä sanaleikkien suureen määrään ovat eläinsanaleikkien yleismaailmallinen luonne, suomalaisten katsojien englannin kielen taito ja tottumus amerikkalaiseen kulttuuriin, sekä kääntäjän ammattitaito ja mielikuvitus. Delabastitan teoria toimi materiaalin analysoinnissa hyvin, mutta eri kategorioiden rajoja voisi paikoin muokata ja yhdenmukaistaa. Tulevaisuudessa tutkielmaa voisi työstää eteenpäin esimerkiksi vertailemalla eri käännöskieliä, tutkimalla lisäksi sanaleikkityyppejä tai laajentamalla aineistoa.

Avainsanat: pun, wordplay, pun translation, pun translation techniques, *BoJack Horseman*, Netflix

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ABSTRACT

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The subject of this bachelor's thesis is the translation of puns in the Netflix original series *BoJack Horseman*, which is a comedy-drama targeted at adults. I will examine the use of different strategies in the translation with Dirk Delabastita's theory of pun translation techniques from 1993 as the basis of my analysis. In his theory, Delabastita differentiates nine different techniques for translating wordplay.

The purpose of the thesis is to establish how much of the series' original puns are preserved in the subtitle translations. In addition, I will also determine how much each technique is used, how well Delabastita's model works within my analysis, and is the translation in its entirety successful.

In total there were 97 puns in the material. The percentages of the different translation techniques go as follows: the SL pun was translated into a TL pun (50%), one of the SL pun's senses was preserved in the translation without a TL pun (28%), the S pun was directly transferred into the translation without translating it (9%), both of the SL pun's senses were preserved in the translation without a TL pun (7%), the SL pun was translated using a different rhetorical device without a TL pun (5%), and the punning segment was completely omitted from the translation (2%).

Half of the translations preserved a pun, and overall, the translation successfully conveyed the linguistically witty nature of the series. Possible reasons behind the high number of puns are the universality of animal puns, the Finnish viewers' English skills and their familiarity with American culture, and the professional skill and imagination of the translator. Delabastita's theory worked well within my analysis, although the categorization could be modified to be more consistent. In the future, the thesis could be developed further by comparing translations in different languages, by examining pun types alongside the translations, and by expanding the material.

Keywords: pun, wordplay, pun translation, pun translation techniques, *BoJack Horseman*, Netflix

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1 Introduction

A pun is like pineapple on pizza – something one either loves or hates with no discernible middle ground. They are a form of humor that is often associated with intolerably awkward “dad jokes” and eliciting anger and frustration instead of laughter from hearers (much depending on the hearer, of course). This has been true for a long time: many historic intellectuals and literary icons have made their disdain of puns crystal clear. Puns have been called the lowest form of wit and the slaughter of language, but they have also had their unapologetic defenders: the film director Alfred Hitchcock famously stated that “puns are the highest form of literature” in a TV interview after delivering an unexpected pun that left even the show’s host momentarily speechless.

On that note, the goal of this bachelor’s thesis is to review the Finnish translations of various puns in the Netflix original series *BoJack Horseman*. I will use pun translation techniques compiled by Dirk Delabastita to identify and categorize the different pun translations found in the series. The goal is to find out which translation strategies are used in the process, how often the strategies are used in relation to each other, and how much of the original punning is lost in translation. I will also speculate possible reasons behind the results and reflect on the overall success of the translation. Lastly, I will further attempt to assess how well Delabastita’s model works within my analysis, and to see if I can discover any possible problems or shortcomings in the theory.

As a person who has lived through the rise of online streaming services, Netflix and other similar sites are a somewhat large part of my free time. *BoJack Horseman* has been one of my favorite series during the first four years of my university life. The series has been riding the newly popularized wave of animated series targeted at adults, and it utilizes several forms of comedy, punning being in a very central role. The wittingly humorous dialogue was one of the very first things I noticed about the series when I started watching it, and probably explained by my current field of study, the translations of the jokes and elaborate wordplay caught my interest and gave me the idea for this thesis.

The bachelor’s thesis is divided into six chapters, first being this introduction. In the second chapter, I will give an overview on general theory behind puns, pun classification, and pun translation. In the third chapter, I will further explain the specific theoretical model proposed by Delabastita that I am going to use in my analysis, and how I have modified it to fit my own research material and findings. The fourth chapter will introduce my material and give more background on the general plot, themes, and linguistic profile of the series. I will also explain the method I will be using to

dissect the material, and how I will utilize the theory explained in the previous chapter. In the fifth chapter, I will apply the theory in analyzing and categorizing the puns present in my material. Finally, the sixth chapter will present my conclusions and ideas how to possibly develop my research questions and this thesis in the future.

2 The case of the pun

A pun is the most basic building block of comedy and, at the same time, a very complicated form of humor. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines puns as “the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound”. Delabastita gives a more detailed definition from a linguistics point of view, saying that “pun is a general name for the various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings” (1996, 128).

Basically, a pun takes advantage of lexical, phonological, or syntactic ambiguity; it triggers two or more meanings in the perceiver’s mind, resulting in a humorous effect. The punning element in a phrase is often called a connector, and its possible meanings are called senses. Most cases of puns have two alternate meanings, but it is possible for a pun to have more than two. The difference between puns and other kinds of linguistic ambiguity is that the ambiguity is very much intentional and that the pun is usually intended to be funny.

2.1 Pun research and classification

The study of puns may, strictly speaking, fall to the territory of humor research, but it lies in a crossroads with linguistics. Structural linguists, in particular, have conjured several different taxonomies for puns over the years and have classified puns, for example, by linguistic phenomenon, linguistic structure, phonemic distance, or using an eclectic approach (Salvatore Attardo 1994, 112).

The most comprehensive list of different types of puns was created by Otto Ducháček, who differentiates puns mostly by the linguistic phenomenon they rely on. This list includes homonymy, homography, paronymy, polysemy, antonymy, morphemic attraction, tendency to motivation, and contamination (Ducháček 1970, cited in Attardo 1994, 113–14). Francisco Yus approaches classifying puns with a broader scope, arguing that a pun can be defined using three different

aspects (or “labels”) it possesses. First is the punning structure and how the two senses of the pun are arranged within the utterance. Second is the relationship between the pun’s two senses, homophony and polysemy being a few examples. Third is the inferential strategy at play in identifying and understanding the pun (Yus 2016, 147–148).

Delabastita, whose pun translation techniques I will be using later in my analysis, divides puns into main classes and sub-classes. The main classes are based on the structural properties of language that the puns employ. According to this, puns can be sorted by phonology and spelling, lexicon, morphology, and syntax (Delabastita 1996, 130). The sub-classes are founded on differences or similarities in form and meaning. Delabastita identifies four different categories (Delabastita 1996, 128) which are similar to many other taxonomies. The categories are puns created by homonymy (meanings have identical sounds and spellings, such as *bow* that is either a type of knot or a polite gesture), puns created by homophony (meanings have identical sounds but different spellings, such as *sea* and *see*), puns created by homography (meanings have different sounds but identical spellings, such as *bass* that is either a fish or a low-register voice), and finally, puns created by paronymy (both the spellings and sounds are slightly different, such as the often easily confused *affect* and *effect*).

Delabastita also divides puns into horizontal and vertical puns (1996, 623) that are also known as paradigmatic and syntagmatic puns, terms coined by Agnieszka Solska (2012, 388). In a vertical pun, the two meanings exist simultaneously on top of each other and are tied to one connector in the punning phrase. An example of a vertical pun would be “I’ve been to the dentist many times, so I know the drill”. In a horizontal pun, the two meanings of the pun exist separately and have their own, consecutive connectors in the punning phrase that they are tied to. “Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like a banana” is a good example of a horizontal pun. Horizontal puns are more straightforward in the sense that they explicitly spell out the two meanings of the pun, whereas vertical puns require more work from the pun’s interpreter and are more likely to be overlooked.

Solska also categorizes puns according to the validity of the possible meanings (2012, 388). If the pun’s senses are equally possible and valid in the context of the pun, the pun is a so-called double retention pun. In so-called single retention puns only one of the pun’s meanings makes sense contextually, but the other meaning is also rational enough to make an alternative interpretation in the perceiver’s mind. Solska gives good examples of both pun types: “Being in politics is just like playing golf: you are trapped in one bad lie after another” is a double retention pun, and “Never invest in funerals, it’s a dying industry” is a single retention pun.

The case of the bilingual pun (also known as the polyglot pun) is also worth mentioning. Delabastita (2005, 162) defines it as a pun that uses two linguistic expressions from two or more different languages. Below is an example of a pun that uses both English and Spanish.

Father: "What have you got there, son?"
Son: "Cereal with soy milk."
Father: "Hola Milk, soy tu padre!"

The bilingual pun differs from other kinds of puns in the sense that it requires knowledge and understanding of the foreign language being used as well as the understanding of the two different meanings of the pun (Delabastita, 2005, 163).

Ritva Leppihalme introduces the concept of an intertextual pun (1997, 42). An intertextual pun takes a known idiom, proverb, quote, or other saying, and changes it slightly to create a new meaning within the saying. An example of this would be the popular greeting "May the Fourth be with you" on Star Wars Day, the 4th of May. Like the bilingual pun, the intertextual pun also requires background knowledge of the saying accommodating the pun.

As this chapter shows, classifying and defining puns is not an issue that researchers have ever unanimously agreed upon, but there still are similarities between theories. The amount of different approaches to puns make it clear that they indeed are one of the more complex elements in language.

2.2 Translating puns

"Humor does not translate" is a popular saying when one struggles to explain to a friend of different nationality why they find a joke funny in their native tongue. Puns and wordplay in general are not an easy cultural barrier to break through, and they are an especially problematic issue for a translator and a part of translation process that at first may seem nearly impossible. All kinds of literature that is not even necessarily comedic, from simple children's books to seemingly high-brow Shakespearean plays, makes use of the phenomenon, so it is also practically inescapable if one wishes to make their career in translating prose.

Much of the discussion around translating puns has revolved around translatability, what makes the process difficult, and why it is still important to make the effort. A pun in its original form in one language can rarely, if ever, be understood in the same way by someone who is not fluent in the language and familiar with the culture. Every word in every language has its own set of connotations and associations, and though words themselves can usually be translated with relative

ease, at least some of the aspects linked to the word in the source language are usually left behind and replaced with the target language reader's own perception of the word. With puns, this problem is magnified, and in most cases, the strategy of literal translation can and should be thrown out of the window.

Martin Anca-Simina states that puns can be bound to either language or culture, or both at the same time. Decoding the pun's meaning requires understanding of both factors, in addition to knowledge about the author and their background (Anca-Simina, 2017, 172). Fahime Koochacki points out that puns have a significant aesthetic effect especially in literary genres and cannot be ignored by the translator without altering the text's formal facet intentionally (Koochaki, 2016, 148). This is especially true with poetry, where prosody is a key element of the text and further hinders the transfer of linguistic and cultural components (Anca-Simina, 2017, 171).

As arduous as it might be, translators must still try their best, because a text may lose much of its character along with its puns. Finding a working pun requires plenty of imagination, and the cultural, contextual, and linguistic pieces of both puns must fit in each other. Rasheed S. Al-Jarrah, et al. (2018, 11) state that often when faced with ambiguity sacrifices are inevitable, and the translator has to decide whether they will stay faithful to the content or try to replicate the effect produced by the original wordplay.

The complex problem of translating puns has made it a somewhat popular subject for research. Aside from Delabastita whose theory was explained in chapter two, other researchers who have devised pun translation strategies include Ritva Leppihalme (1997), Henrik Gottlieb (1997), and Anneke de Vries and Arian J. C. Verheij (1997). The focuses of these pieces of research include wordplay in the Bible, audiovisual pun translation, and puns in Shakespeare's plays. Their listings are narrower than Delabastita's, and their solutions exist in one form or another in his proposed nine strategies, so I will not explain the theories further here. In Finland, Elina Ritala (2010), Anniina Hautakoski (2013), and Rosamaaria Perttola (2014) have written their master's theses on wordplay translation in TV series subtitling. Wordplay and subtitling in general seems to be an especially popular research subject, perhaps because unlike literature, TV series and movies include a visual aspect that complicates the translation.

3 Delabastita's pun translation techniques

As the basis of my analysis of the material I will use Dirk Delabastita's theory of pun translation techniques. Delabastita presents the list of strategies in his book *There's a Double Tongue: An*

investigation into the translation of Shakespeare's wordplay, with special reference to Hamlet which was published in 1993. In the book Delabastita examines translations of the puns in Shakespeare plays, as is evident from the book title.

Delabastita's model of translation techniques is a one comprehensive and extensive, and it covers a variety of different kinds of translation techniques and strategies preserving the overall quality of wordplay. Therefore, it has been a very popular classification among researchers and thesis writers when analyzing translated puns.

Delabastita differentiates nine different translation strategies for translating puns (1993, 191–218), and I have paraphrased the techniques I will be examining in the following list. Given that my aim in this thesis is to review existing pun translations, I will exclude three of the techniques that include adding puns or new textual material in the translation and using editorial techniques such as footnotes. The reason for this is that it would be much too time-consuming to comb through the subtitles to find additional pun material, and audiovisual translators do not have editorial techniques at their disposal.

I have given the chosen techniques more explicit and self-explanatory names that I will be using throughout this thesis. The list of translation techniques I will examine in my analysis goes as follows:

1. *Pun to pun*: the pun in the source text (from now on ST) is translated into a pun in the target text (from now on TT), but the pun may not have the same structural, lexical, or semantic properties.
2. *Pun to non-pun with both senses*: the pun in ST is translated into a non-pun in TT that conveys both the original pun's senses
3. *Pun to non-pun with one sense*: the pun in ST is translated into a non-pun in TT that conveys one sense of the original pun, although in some cases both senses may be translated "beyond recognition" and undecipherable to the reader.
4. *Pun to punoid*: the pun in ST is translated into a phrase in TT that uses a different rhetorical device than the original pun to create a similar humorous effect, like alliteration, metaphor, rhyming, repetition, etc.
5. *Zero translation*: the pun in ST is completely omitted in TT.
6. *Direct transfer*: the pun in ST is transferred into TT in its original form, and not translated into the target language.

These techniques can also be combined and used together, as Delabastita himself points out (1993, 191–218).

Translation techniques “pun to non-pun with one sense” and “pun to non-pun with both senses” can be argued to be too similar to be two distinct categories, and Delabastita himself has written a revised list that combines the two into one technique in this article *Introduction* (1996). This narrower listing has been used by some, but I will use his initial differentiation from 1993 because in the material the translator has in some instances decided very clearly to make both senses visible in the translation.

4 Material and method

In this chapter I will give a more detailed account of the material and further explain my method for analyzing the material in chapter five.

4.1 Material

The material I am going to analyze using the theory stated in the previous chapter are the first two seasons of the Netflix original series *BoJack Horseman*. *BoJack Horseman* is an animated comedy-drama that began airing in 2014 and is directed at an adult audience. Netflix has aired a total of 77 episodes, and at the time of writing this bachelor’s thesis, the streaming service has added the show’s sixth and final season to its website. The episodes are 25–26 minutes long and the first two seasons combined have 24 episodes in total, which has given me roughly 10 hours and 12 minutes of material.

BoJack Horseman tells the story of BoJack, a faded sit-com celebrity horse who, twisted and strained by both his fame and his troublesome childhood, is a people-hating and -hurting, reckless alcoholic. The series is set in a world where anthropomorphic animals co-exist with humans. The difference in species or how such a world can exist is not addressed in the series, and characters have relationships across literal racial lines – to name one, two of the central characters who are married to each other are Diane Nguyen, who is a human, and Mr. Peanutbutter, who is a golden retriever.

The storylines mostly take place in an entertainment industry setting in Hollywood, Los Angeles (a rather obvious equivalent of Hollywood) and are full of references to celebrities both fictitious and real. Many well-known actors and other public figures have done voice acting in the series, and it

also has a high number of cameo appearances from celebrities like Naomi Watts, Paul McCartney, and Daniel Radcliffe. All the famous people behind the show add ammunition to the show's satirical approach, which is evident from the very first episode. The characters are exaggerated versions of different show business archetypes, from ruthless managers to sensationalizing news anchors, and the show takes jabs, for instance, at sexual harassment scandals and election campaigning. On the other side of the coin, however, *BoJack Horseman* can make viewers uncomfortable as much as it can make them laugh. It discusses plenty of serious topics, sometimes through humor but also often just head-on: depression, addiction, emotional abuse, and the pressures of adoption and motherhood, to name a few.

The linguistic quality of the script reflects the show's complex nature. The screenwriters have put an enormous amount of effort in making the lines witty, surprising, and – most importantly regarding the topic of this thesis – laden with puns. *BoJack Horseman*'s world generally gives an especially fruitful ground for animal puns, and the writers definitely make the most of the fact. Wordplay is everywhere you look in the series – of course, in the lines delivered by the characters but also in the characters themselves (Beyonce's husband is called J-Zebra, and is, indeed, a zebra). Punning is constantly present in the background in newspaper articles, commercials, posters, brand names, and generally in fleeting moments and passers-by.

It can be difficult for the viewer to catch all the double meanings and connections, and since a great portion of the puns are delivered in a visual form, they are left untranslated. Examples of this are a bear character taking part in a protest, wielding a sign with the text “BoJack's views are unbearable”, or the shunned black sheep of the family literally being a black sheep. Also, the puns are not always delivered with an emphasizing smile and a wink (although the show does not shy away from that approach, either), and they often exist quietly in lines spoken even in serious and dramatic scenes.

4.2 Method

In this chapter I will explain my method of handling the material and incorporating Delabastita's theory into my analysis.

Firstly, I will go through the material to identify all puns that are translated into Finnish. This will include lines said by the characters and perhaps punning that is carried out in background, given that it is translated in the subtitles. Since nonverbal punning is not written out in episode transcripts that can be found on the internet, I will watch through every episode to make sure all punning is

accounted for. Another reason for this is that even though the pun might be present in the episode transcript, I could potentially overlook it because understanding the pun could require visual context.

Secondly, I will categorize the translations using Delabastita's pun translation techniques and give each translation technique present in the material its own section. Given my material, I expect the number of puns to be quite high, so I will not be writing out every translation, but instead will be giving a few examples of every technique used. If there is interesting variation in the solutions within the technique, I will address it with examples and comment on the possible reasoning behind the solutions.

Thirdly, I will analyze the results of my pun translation categorization and determine how much of the original puns were lost in the translation process and how much each technique was used. I will also contemplate the possible reasons behind the results and how well the translator has succeeded in preserving the show's humorous nature. I will further discuss how well Delabastita's model accommodated the analysis process of my material and how I would possibly modify his categorization. Lastly, I will propose ways to expand the scope of this topic into my upcoming master's thesis.

5 Pun translation strategies in *BoJack Horseman*

Overall, there were 92 instances of clear punning in the 24 episodes analyzed. It was at times difficult to differentiate punning from idioms and other kinds of wordplay, and in the end, I included the lines that were playing around with two distinct meanings and the humorous effect of the line depended on difference of meaning. Within this material that means connectors that trigger two meanings in the viewer's mind, or connectors that trigger two meanings but are also visibly a combination of two words.

Next, I will discuss each different translation technique that was used in translating the puns and give some concrete examples of each technique. Some of the strategies were used very little, like zero translation, but I will still include every employed technique to provide a truthful presentation of the translation. The Finnish translations of the lines are written in italics in the examples, and the pun element is written in bold text in both languages. If the example includes lines by two different characters, the lines will be separated by a line break and dash. I will also use parentheses to indicate extratextual information provided for context.

5.1 Pun to pun

The technique of translating the pun with another pun in TL was a surprisingly popular decision made with this translation. Out of the 92 translated puns in the episodes, 46 made use of some sort of punning in Finnish, which is exactly 50 percent.

On most occasions, the translator has thought of a working pun in Finnish that captures one of the senses of the original pun. In this example, the translator has changed the general concept of “charity” to the country Dominica but has preserved the confusion that the first person is talking about another person.

- (1) – That was the deal. Plug my movie, win money for **charity**.
– Well, tell **Charity** she can kiss my ass. By the way, your girlfriend has a stripper name.
– *Sovimme niin. Mainosta elokuvalle ja rahaa **Dominicalle**.*
– ***Dominica** saa haistaa paskan. Tyttöystävälläsi on stripparin nimi.*
(Season 2, episode 8)

With eight of the puns, it was possible for the translator to translate the lines literally resulting in an identical or nearly identical pun in Finnish. I was expecting the puns to be very culture-bound, so I was somewhat surprised to see that there were that many opportunities for such an approach. Then again, animal puns are more universal than most puns, and the qualities assigned to different animals can be very similar across cultures. Given the series’ animalistic setting, the script did give the translator chances to take the easy route. In this example, literal translation works because *cowboy* can be directly translated to *lehmipoika*.

- (2) – Not so fast, cowboy.
– I’m not a cowboy, I’m a **cow-man**. I’m a man-man.
– *Ei niin nopeasti, lehmipoika.*
– *En ole lehmipoika vaan **lehmimies**. Olen miesmies.*
(Season 2, episode 4)

In another similar literal translation, the translator has made use of a colloquial Finnish word derived from English. The word choice could potentially be lost on someone who has not encountered the word before, but since the target audience for the series definitely is a younger one, the solution works well and preserves the pun in its original form. In this example, the pun is playing with the meanings of “the spy James Bond” and “creating a friendly rapport”, and the translator has used the word *bondata* that retains both senses.

- (3) Yay! I’m calling this road trip the 007, because we are gonna **bond**.
*Tämän automatkan nimi on 007, koska nyt **bondataan**.*
(Season 2, episode 5)

There was also one interesting instance of a pun that combined a visual aspect and dialogue and made me wonder whether the translator had access to the video or just the episode transcript. In this example, BoJack is talking to two of his friends that are trying to convince him to join them on a business venture.

- (4) – Look we haven't worked out all the kinks yet, but the important thing is we've gone public and we want you to get in on the **ground floor**.
– See, that's the problem with all your ideas, they don't have **ground floor**!
– *Kaikki ei ole vielä selvillä, mutta julkistamme tuotteen ja haluamme sinut **messiin**.*
– *Ideoissanne ei ole mitään **ideaa**.*
(Season 1, episode 9)

After the dialogue, the scene cuts to a client walking into a shop that is the duo's most recent and abandoned enterprise, and falling because the shop has no floor, literally. In my opinion, some sort of imagery about a floor, the ground, or a foundation would have been relatively easy to implement into the translation, but the opportunity could have been lost due to the fact that the translator did not have knowledge of the cut in the scene. Despite missing the original pun for one reason or another, the translation still delivers a punning phrase in Finnish.

5.2 Pun to non-pun with one sense

The second most popular technique was translating the pun into a non-pun that preserved one of pun's senses. Out of the 92 pun translations, 26 utilized this technique, which constitutes around 28 percent.

This strategy was often the natural result of the translator choosing one of the punning word's or phrase's meanings and conveying it in the translation. It was a working solution in many instances because even if the pun was lost, the sentence made sense in the context of the scene. This often required that the translator chose the meaning that made sense in the immediate surroundings of the scene instead of the perhaps freer, alternative meaning.

In this example, the pun is created by homophony between the words *damn* and *dam*. The translator has given both utterances a different meaning, and this results in a translation that is missing the pun but fits the situation.

- (5) You know, a lot of people go their whole lives and they never give a **damn**.
But Herb? He gave those beavers a **dam**.
*Useimmat eivät **välitä** mistään, mutta Herb lahjoitti niille majaville **padon**.*
(Season 2, episode 3)

Sometimes the strategy was used in phrases that had uniquely American elements (and in the case of the following example, a Vietnamese element) that could not be replaced with Finnish counterparts in a sensible manner. In this example, the translator has ignored the curse word aspect of the pun completely, although this could again be the result of the translator only having the episode transcript and not being able to hear the pronunciation of the word. This results in a TT pun that preserves the other meaning but does not really make sense.

- (6) Step off! We're American as **pho**! (uttered with the same emphasis and tone as "as fuck")
*Olemme yhtä amerikkalaisia kuin **pho-keitto**!*
 (Season 1, episode 5)

According to Delabastita, this technique also covers situations where the pun is translated so freely that it does not preserve either of the pun's meanings. There were multiple instances where this happened. The example below shows a case where the punning phrase using homophony is erased and replaced with a sentence that does not carry either of the senses.

- (7) – Well, I am a morning person.
 – **I hope you mean mourning with a "u"**, because, Diane, this is deadly serious.
 – *Itse olen aamuihminen.*
 – ***Älä vitsaile liikoja.** Tämä on kuolettavan vakavaa.*
 (Season 1, episode 12)

5.3 Direct transfer

Direct transfer was the third most used technique with eight translations out of the total 92, rounding down to nine percent. It was used mainly with proper names that contain punning. In this example, BoJack (a horse character) is speaking of his past role as the president in a TV show. The name makes a pun playing with BoJack's species and Air Force One, the radio call sign for the airplane carrying the president of the United States.

- (8) They called my airplane **Air Horse One**.
*Lentokoneeni oli "**Air Horse One**".*
 (Season 2, episode 9)

Usually, using this technique means that the viewer cannot understand the pun without being fluent in the source language, but there was one unique instance in the material where direct transfer worked especially well without the viewer being left in the dark. In this particular scene, a character is pointing to an anthropomorphic spider version of Quentin Tarantino.

- (9) Is that Quentin **Tarantulino**?
*Onko tuo Quentin **Tarantulino**?*
 (Season 1, episode 7)

The direct transfer works due to the fact that the word *tarantula* is also the best-known name for the spider in question in Finnish, even though an official Finnish name for the species exists. Therefore, there is no need to translate the name any further. This is, however, an isolated case in the material, and the other translations using direct transfer do not convey the pun to a viewer who does not understand English or have knowledge of the concepts behind the puns.

5.4 Pun to non-pun with both senses

On the total of five occasions, the translator has decided to include both original pun's senses into the translation. This rounds up to seven percent of all translations.

In this example, the translator has decided to include both the translated name of the referenced Elton John song and the punning sense of the changed song name in the translation. There is also a pun in the translation, and this is the only instance where the translator has used two strategies in one translation.

- (10) You don't think Elton John was raking it in when Diana died? More like "**Candle in the Windfall**"!
Luuletko, ettei Elton John lyönyt rahoiksi Dianan kuolemalla? "Kynttilä tuulessa?" Pikemminkin rahasade tuulessa.
(Season 2, episode 3)

In this instance, clarifying both senses is somewhat optional, but in some of the other cases it is unavoidable for the scene to make sense. This necessity is my main reason behind keeping this technique as its own separate category.

5.5 Pun to punoid

There were four translations that used a rhetorical device as a translation technique. They round down to four percent out of the 92 overall puns. I was expecting this strategy to be used more frequently since it can be easier to play with language in other ways than to invent a pun. Contrary to my expectations, this technique lost clearly to the "pun to pun" method in the material.

In this example, the news anchors are referencing the song *Single Ladies* by Beyoncé. The translator has decided to use the lyrics of a Finnish schlager song from the 1950s called *Liian paljon rahaa* in the TT instead of translating the original song's lyrics.

- (11) – Well, Tom, I'm being told she fell on **all the single dollars**.
– **All the single dollars?**
– **All the single dollars.**
– **All the single dollars?**
– **All the single dollars.**

- *Täällä on liian paljon rahaa.*
 - *Liian paljon rahaa?*
 - *Hyvää vaiko pahaa?*
- (Season 1, episode 6)

The Finnish song reference is very likely to be lost on the younger audience, but the translation also uses rhyming, so a type of wordplay is still present. Other translations used rhetorical devices like alliteration and a modified Finnish proverb.

5.6 Zero translation

Zero translation was used in two instances, which constitutes two percent of the translations, and it was the least used translation technique. There were only two translations where the phrase containing the pun was completely omitted, and even in these cases, no complete lines were taken out. Only a few words were removed from a relatively long-winded monologue that remained coherent even without the pun. This makes sense since erasing lots of material could be noticeable for the viewer.

In one of the two translations, the two meanings of the pun are positioned neatly side by side, and the translator has decided to omit one of two phrases that together form the pun.

- (12) Tomorrow is an opportunity. You can be big and proud and bang on your tom-tom drum or you can get in your boat and row. **Tom or row. Tomorrow.**
*Huominen on mahdollisuus. On aika huokaista ja lyödä rumpua tai astua veneeseen ja aloittaa soutaminen. **Huominen.***
 (Season 2, episode 1)

5.7 Summary

To summarize, my analysis showed that the material had 92 pun translations. Exactly half of the pun translations preserved a pun in Finnish. In 28 percent of the cases, the pun was translated into a non-pun that retained one of the senses, and in seven percent of the cases it was translated into a non-pun that retained both senses. Nine percent of the translations utilized direct transfer, five percent used other rhetorical devices, and in two percent of the pun translations the punning element was completely omitted. There was only one instance of using two different techniques in one translation.

6 Conclusions

One of my research questions was to find out how much of the punning is lost in the translation process, and from my analysis it seems that the answer is half of the puns. The strategy of translating the pun into a punning phrase in TL was the only one of the techniques that included punning, and the translator used it in exactly 50 percent of cases. Personally, I found the percentage of these kinds of translations to be surprisingly (albeit positively) high. My initial assumption was that instead of punning, the translator would have used other rhetorical devices (“pun to punoid” technique) more to preserve the feeling of wordplay, but my analysis proved me wrong.

Professionals working in audiovisual translation are not usually given ample time for their work, and the very space on the screen reserved for subtitles gives its own set of limitations. Despite that, the translator of the series still managed very well to maintain much of the punning.

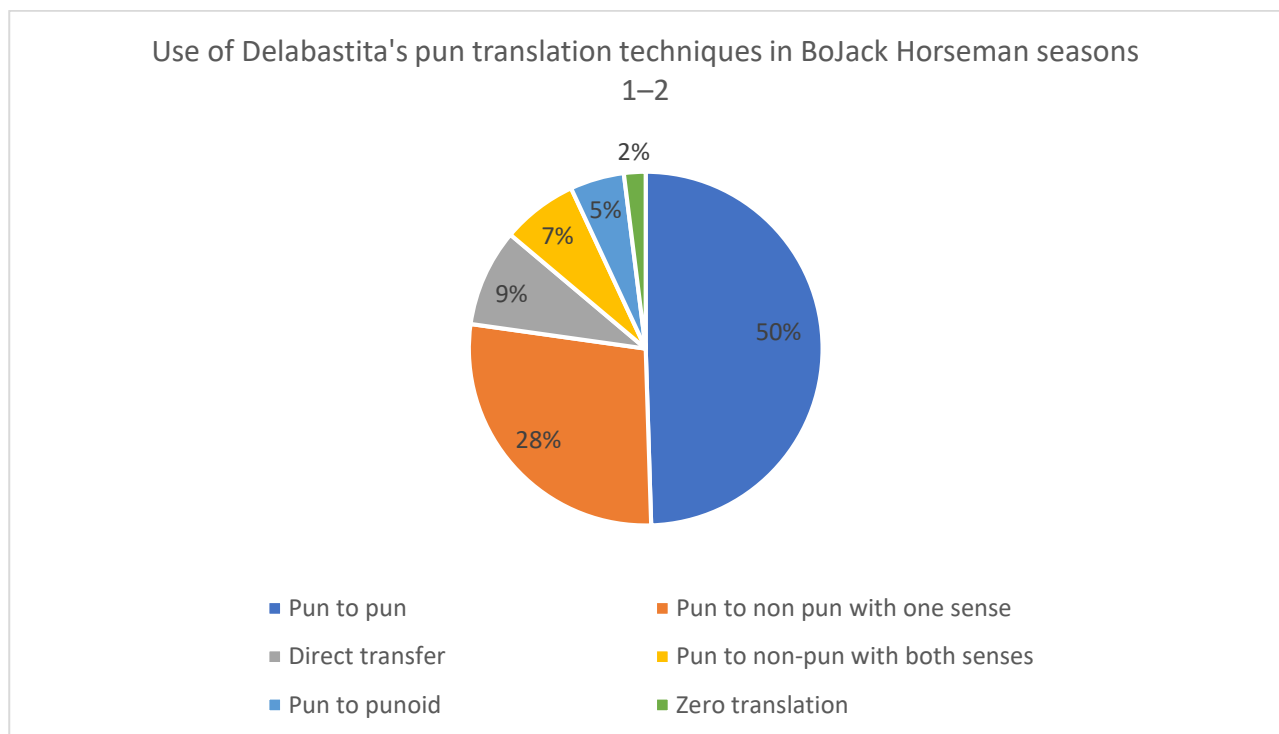
One possible reason behind the large percentage of punning translation could be the amount of animal puns present in the series. Like I stated in section 5.1., the more universal quality of puns referencing to animals gave some opportunity for direct translating. Even if the pun was not identical in both languages, there often was another closely related animal pun that could be used in its place. There was also at least one instance where the translator had included their own original animal pun in the translation of a pun that had no animalistic facet to it.

Secondly, Finland has arguably become quite americanized when it comes to our entertainment consumption. Furthermore, Finns are relatively fluent in English, and the Finnish language has plenty of English loan words and anglicisms, especially among young people who are the show’s main audience. Finn’s understanding of American culture and the gradual mixing of the two languages might have made the task easier on the translator and removed the need to drastically domesticate every pun. This is especially evident in example three with the colloquial word *bondata*.

Thirdly, the translator’s skill and imagination must be commended. The field of audiovisual translation is not as highly regarded as translating prose, for example, and the translators do not have much time to mull over linguistic challenges. Therefore, quick wit and problem solving are important qualities. On the other hand, *BoJack Horseman* was Netflix’s first animated original series with a star-studded cast, which adds a lot to the production value. That may have put some pressure on the company to invest more in the translation to help the show earn revenue, but this is only speculating on my part.

In any case, the puns in the material were often anything but simple to translate, and sometimes the translator had to abandon the senses of the original pun completely. They still managed to craft puns that were coherent with the scene and toyed skilfully with the Finnish language. Given the complexity of the task, I consider half of the puns saved a praise-worthy achievement.

The second research question was to find out how much the translator used each translation strategy, and for this I got clear-cut answers. The graph below summarizes and illustrates the usage of each pun translation technique and their respective percentages.



Out of all Delabastita’s pun translation techniques, the two most used ones by a wide margin were translating the pun in ST into a pun in TT and translating the pun in ST into a non-pun phrase in TT that preserved one of the pun’s meanings. Rest of the strategies comprised less than 25 percent of overall translations. With zero translation and direct transfer this is not surprising since omitting material and copying it without translating are not very viable solutions in audiovisual (or any) translation. Omission is less conspicuous in literature but with subtitling the viewer can easily spot missing material.

As to how well Delabastita’s model worked in my own research, I would say that in practically all cases the translation fit neatly into his proposed categories. Most of the initial confusion in the analysis portion was due to the issue of whether a type of wordplay was a pun or not, and not due to

assigning pun translations into Delabastita's categories. As I explained in chapter three, I did decide to leave out three of his strategies that involved added pun material and editorial techniques, but this was only because they did not accommodate my research questions and material, and not due to their futility as translation techniques in general.

However, the translation technique "pun to non-pun with one sense" seems to work as an umbrella technique for too many solutions. Personally, I feel like translations that are missing both the punning element and both senses of the original pun should have their own category. After all, preserving even a piece of the pun is, in my opinion, a whole different solution than rendering it into a form that is in no way related to its meanings.

In addition, the technique "pun to pun" could logically be divided into categories based on whether the translation retains one or all senses of the pun, just as Delabastita has done with "pun to non-pun" strategy. Punning translations with entirely different senses from the original wordplay could also have their own category (although I did not find any instances of this in the material, it is plausible for such a solution to work). The benefit of adding further sub-categories into the already extensive list is debatable, but it would, in my opinion, make the list more consistent and separate the different approaches more clearly.

BoJack Horseman is a show that gets a huge part of its character from witty wordplay. Along with the show's darker themes, the clever script is what draws in an adult audience and has helped the series to avoid being labelled as a dime-a-dozen cartoon. It has further helped *BoJack Horseman* to earn high ratings across the board, many critics citing the stellar writing as the backbone of the series. Therefore, translating the humor sufficiently is critical for the show to maintain its appeal across the extremely multilingual Netflix userbase. Of course, one could argue that an average adult Finnish viewer is fluent enough in English to understand the original jokes. This may be true in Finland and in the Nordic countries, but the level of wordplay in the series is often high enough to prove general English skills lacking when it comes to fully understanding the humor. The show also does not pander to its audience by making the humor easily accessible to all nationalities, so subtitling also helps to convey the cultural references that are more likely to be overlooked by viewers.

I feel like the translation succeeded well in conserving the show's atmosphere. Not only a large percentage of the puns was preserved, but the translator has found solutions that are high-quality puns instead of cheap "dad jokes". Of course, the approach they have taken may have been very

different at times, but the feeling of stimulating and surprising humor does not disappear. In addition, the translator's creativity was not limited to pun translations, and they maintained a versatile Finnish translation throughout the two seasons that matched the wit of its English counterpart. Like I said earlier, I expected the translator to have used other rhetorical devices more, and perhaps they could have reached an even better outcome if they had incorporated other means of distinct wordplay in the pun translations. On the other hand, they may have added wordplay elsewhere in the translation to compensate, but unfortunately that falls outside the scope of this thesis. The result is still commendable when one takes into consideration how little time and resources the translator probably had in their disposal.

In this thesis, I limited my research material to the first two seasons of *BoJack Horseman*. In the future, if I decide to expand this theme into my master's thesis, it would be interesting to broaden my scope and include more seasons. In this thesis I decided to exclude Delabastita's strategy of adding material, but with a wider scope that could also be taken into consideration. The series takes on more introspective and serious themes as it progresses and has plotlines that lean more towards a drama than a comedy. Given this partial shift in the general mood of the show, it would be intriguing to observe the overall distribution of the puns in addition to their translations. It could also be worthwhile to categorize the different types of puns present in the material, and to see if the pun type has any correlation to the used translation method. The broader aspect of audio-visual translation could be introduced into the thesis and I could examine if the limitations of space and time constrict translating the puns. In addition, it would be extremely interesting to compare translations in different languages (Finnish and Swedish, for example) to explore how differently punning is preserved.

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