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WHY DID THEY TRANSLATE IT LIKE THAT?

On Translations of Puns in *RuPaul's Drag Race*
Subtitles

ABSTRACT

Siiri Nousiainen: Why did they translate it like that? On Translations of Puns in *RuPaul's Drag Race* Subtitles
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This thesis examines how puns in *RuPaul's Drag Race* have been translated from English to Finnish. The objective is to analyze how the translations match the originals and to see how their meanings match or differ. This study is meant to provide more research regarding pun translations in the English—Finnish language pair.

The data consists of 31 puns and their Finnish translations which were collected from seasons 12 (US) and 4 (UK) of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The selection of puns was done by viewing all episodes from both seasons and picking out puns which represent different pun types. All puns from the episodes were not included due to a large amount of data and the length restrictions of this paper. After the data collection, the puns were categorized according to pun types presented by Dirk Delabastita and a few examples from each category were picked for the analysis. The analysis includes descriptions of the puns, information about the possible changes in meaning and the translation strategies used. The puns are analyzed through the translation strategies by Dirk Delabastita and Teresa Tomaszkiwewicz. Delabastita's strategies consider all puns whereas those of Tomaszkiwewicz focus on jokes with cultural references.

The main observations of the analysis are that it is common for puns to be translated as non-puns and that the pun category can change in the translation progress. Phonological puns seem to be the most difficult to translate because there were no phonological puns in the translations although they were the most common type in the English dataset. In addition, cultural references in puns were often omitted completely or translated literally which did not preserve the comedic effect of the pun.

Keywords: pun, wordplay, translation, humor

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Siiri Nousiainen: Why did they translate it like that? On Translations of Puns in *RuPaul's Drag Race* Subtitles

Kandidaatintutkielma

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Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee sanaleikkien käännöksiä englannista suomeen *RuPaul's Drag Race* -sarjan tekstityksissä. Tutkielmassa analysoidaan suomenkielisten käännösten merkityksiä suhteessa niiden alkuperäisiin englanninkielisiin versioihin. Tämän työn tarkoituksena on lisätä saatavilla olevaa tutkimusaineistoa sanaleikkien käännöksistä kieliparissa englant-suomi.

Tutkimusaineisto koostuu 31:stä sanaleikistä ja niiden suomenkielisistä käännöksistä. Aineisto kerättiin katsomalla kaikki jaksot *RuPaul's Drag Race* -sarjan kausilta 12 (amerikkalainen versio) ja 4 (brittiversio) ja valitsemalla niistä mahdollisimman monipuolisia esimerkkejä. Kaikkia sanaleikkejä molemmilta kausilta ei sisällytetty aineistoon, sillä datan määrä olisi ollut liian suuri tämän tutkimuksen pituusrajoituksiin nähden. Datankeruun jälkeen sanaleikit kategorisoitiin Dirk Delabastitan määrittämiin sanaleikkityyppeihin ja jokaisesta tyypistä valittiin muutama esimerkki analyysia varten. Analyysiosiossa keskitytään esimerkkien kuvailuun, mahdollisiin merkityksen muutoksiin sekä kääntämisessä käytettyihin strategioihin. Käännösstrategiat ovat peräisin Dirk Delabastitan ja Teresa Tomaszkiwiczin teorioista. Teoriat koskevat kaikkien sanaleikkien sekä kulttuuriviittauksia sisältävien vitsien kääntämistä.

Tutkielmani pääpäättelmä on, että käännökset eroavat usein niiden alkuperäisistä versioista paljon, sillä käännökset eivät välttämättä ole sanaleikkimuodossa. On myös yleistä, että käännöksen sanaleikkityyppi on vaihtunut alkuperäisestä johonkin toiseen. Fonologiaan perustuvat sanaleikit ovat nähtävästi kaikista vaikeimpia kääntää, sillä käännösaineistossa ei ollut yhtäkään tähän luokkaan kuuluvaa sanaleikkiä, vaikka fonologiset sanaleikit olivat englanninkielisessä aineistossa kaikista yleisimpiä. Lisäksi kulttuuriviittauksia sisältävät sanaleikit usein käännettiin joko kirjaimellisesti tai jättämällä viittaus pois. Tämä strategia ei kuitenkaan tehnyt käännöksistä yhtä humoristisia alkuperäisiin verrattuna.

Avainsanat: sanaleikki, kääntäminen, huumori, tekstitykset

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin Originality Check -ohjelmalla.

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1 Introduction

This thesis analyzes the translations of puns from English to Finnish in the subtitles of a TV show called *RuPaul's Drag Race* by World of Wonder. Pun is a type of wordplay which uses similar sounding or looking sounds, words and phrases in an unexpected way to create a humorous effect (Attardo 2020, 178). Translating puns, however, is extremely challenging because they are based on the vocabulary and structures of the language and culture they are produced in (Kovács 2020, 69). The translation process is especially hard if the source language and target language do not come from the same language family (Golden 1995, 1078). Since Finnish comes from the Uralic language family (Abondolo and Valijärvi 2023, i) and English from the Indo-European family (Mugglestone 2006, 12), their structures, vocabularies, pronunciation, idioms and culture are noticeably different. This can cause difficulties in the translation process and can sometimes lead into the humor getting lost in translation. To better understand why puns might lose their intended original meaning or how their meanings change, I will study the differences and similarities between the Finnish pun translations and their original English versions.

The TV-series *RuPaul's Drag Race* has been chosen as the data for this thesis because the language in it is quite versatile, humorous and contains a lot of wordplay. Puns and humor in general are things that make translation difficult, thus a series full of audiovisual puns and cultural references is a fascinating object of study. Humor is one of the elements that makes drag and *Drag Race* interesting, so trying to preserve as much humor as possible in the translations of the jokes would be desirable. *Drag Race* is also culturally significant, because it has brought drag into publicity (Brennan and Gudelunas 2017, 3) and spread the art of drag internationally. Although drag and *Drag Race* are now more known than ever, it is likely that most people are not familiar with them since they cater to a very specific audience: gay Americans and drag queens. Furthermore, *RuPaul's Drag Race* has not really been studied from the perspective of translation since there is just one master's thesis (Vuorenlinna 2020) written in Finnish and a couple other texts about English—Spanish translations (Sánchez et al. 2019 and Villanueva 2019). Vuorenlinna (2020) analyzes the difference between the Finnish and Swedish translations of the English puns whereas this study only focuses on the Finnish translations. This thesis also examines the translations by using two types of translation theories: strategies by Delabastita (1996) which focus on all puns and strategies by

Tomaszkiweicz (1993) which concentrate on translating jokes with cultural references. Puns often make references that are culture specific which means that the translator must not only translate the language of the pun, but also culturally bound concepts. Thus, analyzing the possible cultural references can help bring more detail into the analysis of the translations.

The study begins with a theoretical section where the relevant concepts like audiovisual texts, translation of humor and puns are explained. There is also an introduction of the translation strategies by Delabastita (1996) and Tomaszkiweicz (1993) which will be used in the analysis. The research method and material will be presented in the 3rd chapter which is followed by the analysis section where examples from the data are studied. Lastly, there will be a short conclusion of the study results and some reflection about the study.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Audiovisual translation

Audiovisual translation is a branch of translation studies which specializes in audiovisual media such as TV shows and movies (Remael 2010, 12) These types of media utilize moving images and sounds in verbal and non-verbal forms to create meanings and messages (13). According to Remael (13), verbal signs include uttered words or written texts on the screen whereas non-verbal signs are, for example, the characters' expressions, movements and sounds such as screams or music. The purpose of audiovisual translation is to transfer verbal information and non-verbal sounds from one language to another by subtitling or dubbing (Cintas & Remael 2014, 9). However, translation does not only refer to translation from language A to language B (interlingual translation), but it can also mean the modification of texts within the same language (intralingual translation) or to the process of translating, for example, words to images (intersemiotic translation) (9 & 10). In addition, there are various types of audiovisual translation such as subtitling, voice-over and surtitling (Zolzcer 2016, 76), but the focus of this thesis will be on interlingual subtitles.

Translating audiovisual media is not easy, although it might seem straight forward to someone who is not specialized in it. In fact, translators of audiovisual media must be extremely creative, firstly, because the information changes form from oral to written (Cintas & Remael 2014, 9)

and secondly, because the translations must correspond to the utterances and the timing of those utterances as well as the visuals. Also, subtitles cannot always include all the spoken language because there are set guidelines regarding length, duration, spacing among other things (AV-Kääntäjät 2020). Due to the restrictions of space and time, translators must shorten the utterances, but also try to maintain their original meanings. Therefore, parts of speech might be deleted completely (total reduction) or the message might be changed (partial reduction) in a way that might not completely match the original utterance (Cintas & Remael 2014, 146). In addition to the challenges mentioned before, one prominent issue with subtitling and audiovisual translation is humor.

2.2 Translating audiovisual humor

Defining humor has long been a challenge for scholars, as Vandaele discusses in an article about humor and its definitions (Vandaele 2020). Based on Vandaele's (2020, 150-156) discussion on the definitions of humor one could say that humor can mean utterances and actions which intentionally or unintentionally cause laughter or amusement in someone, or the cause of those utterances and actions. Although it should be noted that "you can have laughter without humour and humour" without laughter (Blake 2007, 3). That is because someone can laugh in a situation that is not funny at all or not laugh when laughter is expected. Not all humor is successful since everyone has a different view on what is funny and what is not. Furthermore, humor is often based on common knowledge (Zabalbeascoa 2005, 189) because the probability of its success is higher when all participants know what is being joked about. Humor can be very specific, meaning that it can use words or concepts that are only known by a certain audience or that it consists of elements that are not found in the target language. These elements can be, for example, cultural references or linguistic structures and idioms. Cintas & Remael (2021, 202) define cultural references as follows: "Cultural references (CRs) are references to items that are tied up with a community's culture, history or geography, and they can pose serious translation challenges." A situation where a cultural reference complicates the translation process can be, for example, when a Finnish person says *torille* (to the market square [my translation]) when Finland is mentioned in non-Finnish media. This utterance probably does not make any sense to a non-Finnish person, because *torille* is a cultural reference which is usually not known by people outside Finnish culture. For someone to understand the reference they need to know the context: Finns say *torille* when Finland wins the Ice Hockey World Championship (and the

hockey fans gather at a market square) or when Finland is randomly mentioned in non-Finnish media. On top of cultural references, jokes that are built on wordplay can further complicate their translation, and one of such joke types is the pun.

2.3 Puns and translating them

Pun is a subtype of wordplay (Giorgadze 2014, 271) which exploits double meanings in language by using words or phrases that can be interpreted in at least two different ways (Attardo 2018, 91). The double meaning in a pun can be based on spelling, pronunciation, words with more than one meaning or an utterance that is ambiguous (Barry 2007, 68 and Attardo 2018, 92). Puns are usually meant to be humorous (Attardo 2018, 91) but they can also be used to make a message more memorable. Also, playing with words can be gratifying (Winter-Froemel et al., 2018, 10) because understanding puns requires knowledge of language, idioms and culture. For that reason, whether a pun is understood depends on the receiver's ability to decode its message based on the context the pun is said in.

What makes puns so unique and difficult to translate is their connection to the language they are produced in. Puns exploit language structure and use similar sounding words, idioms and fixed expressions which might not exist in a similar form or at all in another language. For example, there is a pun in *Lion King* (1994) which is difficult to translate to Finnish due to Finnish and English lexicons being so different. In the pun a bird called Zazul is talking about cheetahs, and he says: "Cheetahs never prosper". For English speaking viewers the pun is obvious, *cheetah* (the animal) and *cheater* (someone who deceives) sound similar and somewhat resemble each other orthographically. However, in Finnish cheetah is *gepardi* and cheater is *huijari*, so they are written and pronounced in a completely different way, thus the pun does not work in Finnish at all. These kinds of dilemmas make translating audiovisual puns extremely demanding. The example from *Lion King* only represents one type of pun, the *phonological pun*, but there are various other types, which will be discussed next.

There are several different categorizations of puns and one of the most well-known ones is by Delabastita (1996, 130). According to him puns can "exploit" six linguistic structures: phonological, graphological, lexical (polysemantic or idiomatic), morphological and syntactic structures. However, this thesis will not discuss graphological or syntactic puns since there were none in the data. In addition to the linguistic structures, the content of puns can be analyzed by looking at what types of play on sound and meaning they are based on. Delabastita (1996, 128)

has specified that puns can be divided into homonyms, homographs, homophones and paronyms. However, the term *homonym* can be used in two different ways. Some linguists consider *homographs* and *homophones* as subcategories of *homonym*, whereas Delabastita refers to them as three different but equal categories. In this thesis *homonyms* mean words which are written and pronounced the same but have different meanings like *bear* (the animal) and *bear* (to carry something). Furthermore, *homophones* are words that sound similar, but are written differently such as *cell* (the room where prisoners sleep in or a small organism) and *sell* (act of exchanging something for money). *Homographs* are based on words with identical spelling, but different sounds like *tear* (as in a tear drop) and *tear* (to rip). Lastly, *paronyms* are a type of pun in which there are slight differences in both spelling and pronunciation, for example, “I like you very macho” is a paronym where *macho* has replaced the word *much*. Their spelling and pronunciation are similar, but not identical, and their meanings are different.

The linguistic structures which puns can be categorized by, make use of different types of methods to create the pun effect. Firstly, *phonological puns* use homophones and paronyms to create puns like in this example: “Becoming a vegetarian is one big missed steak.” (Liles 2023). In that example the double meaning comes from the similar sounding paronyms *missed steak* and *mistake*. *Lexical puns*, on the other hand, make use of *polysemantic* words (words with multiple meanings) or *idioms*. *Idioms* are phrases which always contain a certain set of words which have a transferred meaning (secondary or non-literal meaning) (Veisbergs 1997, 156). An idiomatic lexical pun can be, for example, “Two silkworms had a race. They ended up in a tie.” (Parent 2021). The word *tie* is a homonym which can either refer to 1) a silky accessory worn around the neck or 2) to a situation where there is no winner. The idiom *to end up in a tie* refers to the second meaning of the word *tie*, but in the pun the meaning of the idiom is supposed to be literal: silkworms were used to make a tie. According to Veisbergs (1997, 158), idiomatic puns are created by modifying the structure or the semantics of the idiom. Structural transformation can be done by adding something new to the start (addition) or inside the idiom (insertion), making a reference to something outside the idiom (allusion), deleting a part of the idiom (ellipsis) or by replacing at least one part of the idiom (substitution). Semantic transformation means that the context in which the idiom is in changes the way it can be interpreted. These types of idiomatic puns will be further discussed in the analysis section. Moreover, *morphological puns* experiment with word formation by either compounding already existing words together (compounds) like *thunderwear* (*thunder* + *wear*) or making a

blend (Braun, 2018, 180) of two or more words. *Mansplain*, for example, is a blend of *man* + *s+ explain*.

2.4 Translation strategies

The pun translation analysis will be done by using Delabastita's pun translation strategies which have been rephrased below (1996, 134):

1. Pun to pun: a pun is translated into another pun in the target language which can either be a pre-existing one or made-up by the translator
2. Pun to non-pun: pun is translated so that it no longer appears as a pun (although it can still convey the intended original meaning)
3. Pun to related rhetorical device: pun is translated into some other type of wordplay, but not a pun
4. Pun to zero: the pun is not translated at all, and it is skipped in the translation
5. Pun ST to pun TT: the pun is translated into a similar pun that already exists in the target language
6. Non-pun to pun: a pun is created in the target language without the source text having a pun
7. Zero to pun: a pun is created in the translation although there is no pun or material similar to it in the source text
8. Editorial techniques: the translator adds extra information like footnotes to the translation to explain the translation.

Additionally, the translation strategies by Tomaszkiweicz (1993, cited in Diaz-Cintas 2009, 45) for cultural jokes will also be used to further analyze what changes the puns have gone through.

The strategies are:

1. Omission: the cultural reference is deleted
2. Literal translation: translating the reference as it is without adapting it to the target culture
3. Borrowing: the words from the original joke are used in the translation
4. Equivalence: the translation has the same reference as the original text and its function is similar to the original

5. Adaptation (or domestication): the reference is modified to fit the source culture and language
6. Replacement: the cultural term is replaced with deictics
7. Generalization: the reference is made simpler by making it less specific
8. Explication: the reference is explained in the translation.

3 Material

The data used in this thesis has been collected from the 12th (US version) and 4th (UK version) seasons of *RuPaul's Drag Race* which is an American reality TV show produced by World of Wonder. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *drag* as “performance in which a person adopts an exaggerated or parodic feminine or (less often) masculine persona, typically with glamorous or outrageous and stereotypical gendered costumes, make-up etc.” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.) The performers of drag are called drag queens and drag kings, but this study will only refer to drag queens since there are no drag kings in the data. *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a show where a group of drag queens compete against each other in various challenges regarding comedy, fashion, singing, dancing and acting. Each episode includes two challenges and a runway section where the contestants show off their outfits while the judges comment on them, usually in a comedic nature. In addition, some of the challenges are so called “comedy challenges” where the contestants must use humor in some type of way, thus each episode contains plenty of jokes that are often in the form of puns. Some of the jokes are understandable to the regular English speaker because they use words with their literal meanings or they use well-known idioms, but some of the humor is related to drag slang and culture which are impossible to understand without some background knowledge. Many of the contestants and judges are a part of the LGBTQ+ community which represents all gender and sexual minorities. That is why some of the jokes in *RuPaul's Drag Race* refer to LGBTQ+ themes such as sex, sexuality, discrimination, gender identity and, naturally, drag.

The data was collected by watching all episodes from season 12 (US) on Netflix (2020) and season 4 (UK) on Yle Areena (2022). Not all puns from the episodes were selected for the data because the amount of data would have been too large for a study of this proportion. The puns selected for the study represent different types of puns with and without cultural references. The original number of puns collected in English was 33, however, after reading about the

differences between puns and wordplay, two of the 33 examples seemed to be something other than puns. Thus, the data now consists of 31 puns which are originally in English and have been translated into Finnish. The Finnish translations of season 12 are by Tuija Tuominen and those of season 4 by Sari Luhtanen.

4 Method

The methods used in this study are comparative and quantitative analyses. All the 31 puns were placed into one of the six pun categories presented by Delabastita (1996): phonological puns, graphological puns, lexical idiomatic puns, lexical polysemic puns, morphological puns and syntactical puns. However, the data has no cases of syntactical or graphological puns, so those categories will not be discussed. Assigning categories to the puns was quite demanding because some of them fit more than one category. However, I decided to place each pun into just one of the categories even if they fit more than one because I wanted to determine which pun types were the most common and having overlap in categories would have disturbed that. So, for example, if a pun used blending to create a new word that sounds like an already existing word, I categorized it as a morphological pun instead of morphological and phonological. Furthermore, puns that included idioms, but also aspects of phonological puns, were categorized as lexical idiomatic puns because the idiomatic parts were the base of the joke.

In the next chapter a few examples from each of the pun categories will be presented and the translations analyzed in reference to the original puns. The pun types will be discussed from the most to least common in the data. Although not all 31 puns will be discussed, the examples studied represent different types of puns and strategies. I will explain the meanings of the English puns to properly compare them to their translations because the translations might have different meanings than the original ones. The translation strategies used are mentioned in each case, however, strategies by Tomaszkiweicz are used only in cases where the pun has a cultural reference.

5 Analysis

5.1 Phonological puns

Phonological puns were the most common pun type in my data since 14 of the 31 puns were based on phonology. Phonological puns are seemingly easy to produce because even a small change in sound can create the wanted effect. In most cases, a word in a standard sentence is replaced with a similar sounding paronym. This was the case in an episode where some contestants wore round purple outfits and one of the judges uttered:

- (1) EN: This looks grape on you.
FI: Olette oikeita rypälepommeja.
(Season 12, episode 3)

In example 1 the English pun resembles the phrase “this looks great on you” but the word *great* has been replaced by the paronym *grape* which creates the comedic phonological effect. Its translated version, however, differs quite a lot because it does not use a similar expression as the original. It has created a morphological word blend, but its reference is not entirely clear. *Rypälepommi* could be considered a blend of the terms *rypäle* ‘grape’ and *povipommi* ‘bombshell’. *Povipommi* is a word which tabloids often use to refer to a person with big breasts, but the meaning of the reference is not very clear, so the translation can be considered as some other rhetorical device or as a pun. The blend is probably meant to be a pun, so it can be said that the translation strategy is *pun to pun*. Nonetheless, the translation creates a similar effect to the English one, just the pun category has changed from phonological to morphological.

Furthermore, about one third of the puns in whole the data make cultural references which are either related to popular culture like films and art or drag culture. Translating cultural references in puns can be laborious since the translator must decide whether they adapt the reference to the target culture or not. Adapting a cultural reference can make the pun easier to understand, but that also means that the original reference disappears. Interestingly, there was a case where the Finnish cultural reference was harder to decode than the English one:

- (2) EN: It’s more like planet of the drapes.
FI: Verhotangon taikaa.
(Season 4, episode 4)

In case 2, the pun is a joke about an outfit made from literal drapes. The English version makes a clear reference to the *Planet of the Apes* franchise and the pun has a change in sound and

meaning since *drapes* has replaced *apes*. However, what the Finnish translation refers to is a bit unclear. It could be a reference to the album *Tangon taikaa* by Veikko Ahvenainen (1999), to Eino Grön's album called *Suomalaisen tangon taikaa* (1982) or just tango in general. Regardless, the translator has created a matching pun which refers to drapes and something connected to culture. The translation strategy used is *pun to pun* and the translator has also adapted the reference by making it about something belonging to Finnish culture instead of the Northern American culture. However, the pun category has changed from phonological to morphological.

There was another culture specific pun in the phonological pun category might not be understood by most people due to one of its unordinary references:

- (3) EN: She's living the merkin dream.
FI: Hän elää intiimiperuukkiunelmaa.
(Season 12, episode 8)

Pun 3 is a great example of a phonological pun that is very hard to translate because understanding even its English version requires specific knowledge. Firstly, *merkin* is a wig that is worn on the pubic area and secondly, its Southern American pronunciation resembles the pronunciation of *American*. Additionally, *living the dream* is a common phrase in English and *the American dream* is a known concept in the United States. So, at first the utterance might sound like *she's living the American dream* but if one is able to connect the references to each other they will notice that it is a phonological pun about merkins. This type of pun is a challenge for translators because it makes a culture specific reference and secondly, the Finnish pronunciation of *merkin* does not resemble the pronunciation of *American* 'amerikkalainen', thus trying to mimic the English pun is impossible. The Finnish version is a literal translation which seems to resemble a morphological pun because *intiimiperuukkiunelmaa* is a blend of *intiimiperuukki* 'merkin' and *amerikkalainen unelma* 'the American dream'. However, the phonological aspect has been lost due to the differences in pronunciation in the languages. *Merkin* has been translated as *intiimiperuukki* (pubic wig) although the Finnish equivalent is also *merkin*. This translation is like the one in example 2, where a phonological pun has been translated into a morphological pun (or some other rhetorical device, depending on the interpretation). Here, the translation strategies used are *pun to pun*, *literal translation* and *generalization* because the merkin has been translated as its literal meaning instead of the actual Finnish term for it.

The examples discussed before have all used the *pun to pun* (or *pun to other rhetorical device*) strategy, but the *pun to non-pun* strategy was actually the most common among phonological puns and the whole data. For example, the following joke transformed from a pun to a non-pun.

- (4) EN: Alright, let's see somebody Elsa
FI: Seuraavaksi joku Elsa
(Season 12, episode 6)

In the pun *Elsa* refers to a costume of a queen who looked like *Elsa* from *Frozen* (2013). In English *somebody Elsa* works well as a pun because it sounds like *somebody else*, but that does not work in Finnish because *somebody else* is *joku muu* or *joku toinen* in Finnish and it does not have any words resembling *Elsa*. The cultural reference is not really the problem here since *Elsa* is written the same in Finnish and English, but the problem are the lexical differences of the two languages. Thus, the pun is not translated as a pun, but as either a non-pun or other rhetorical device and the cultural reference has been translated using the *equivalence* strategy since the *Frozen* reference is kept. Although the English and Finnish versions mean exactly the same in the literal sense, they do not share the same secondary meaning.

All in all, 71% of the phonological puns in the data were translated using the *pun to non-pun* strategy and the rest with the *pun to pun* strategy. None of the Finnish translations were in the form of a phonological pun. As for cultural references the most used strategy was *literal translation* which covers 6 out of 10 phonological puns with cultural references.

5.2 Lexical puns

Lexical puns were nearly as common as phonological ones since there were 12 of them. Although puns are usually intentional, there was a funny case of accidental punning when a contestant was telling a story about her outfit, and she had a muff covering her hands:

- (5) EN: She's hoping to find her a husband. someone who can carry her big muff around.
FI: (hän) haluaa löytää aviomiehen. Joku, joka auttaa ison muhvin kanssa.
(Season 12, Episode 6)

As a noun, *muff* is a polysemantic word and its primary meaning is “a warm tubular covering for the hands” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As a slang term, however, it refers to a vagina (Collins dictionary, n.d.). In *RuPaul's Drag Race* the queens refer to themselves with she/her pronouns

and they joke about having vaginas quite often. So, when the contestant talked about a *muff*, she did not realize at first that it could be interpreted in a sexual way. The translated version does not have this same type of ambiguity because *muhvi* ‘muff’ does not have a similar secondary meaning in Finnish. It would be impossible for the translator to create a similar effect in Finnish because although *muhvi* is a polysemantic word, it cannot be used to refer to something sexual. The Finnish version is a literal translation and its translation strategy is *pun to non-pun*. This strategy was used for half of the 12 lexical puns probably due to the dissimilarity of idioms and polysemantic words in the source and target languages.

Regardless, there was a case where the translation matched the original pun well. It was uttered when a queen entered the runway in a plant inspired outfit:

- (6) EN: Oh ou she soiled herself.
FI: voi ei, multa tuli.
(Season 4, Episode 5)

The pun works both in English and Finnish because *soil oneself* and *multa tuli* both make a reference to soil and defecating oneself. The original pun is based on an idiom and polysemy because *soil* as a noun means the material on the surface of the earth where plants can grow but in an idiom it refers to self-defecation. The Finnish version is more polysemy based since *multa tuli* is not an idiomatic expression, but it can be interpreted as something coming out of the speaker. So, both jokes are lexical puns, and they have a similar meaning and function. Thus, the translation tactic used is *pun to pun*. The *pun to pun* strategy was used the most for lexical puns which suggests that they might be easier to translate than phonological ones.

As discussed before, some puns contain cultural references and there was a case in the UK version of the series which specifically referred to British culture. A ginger haired queen called *Copper top* entered the room and said:

- (7) EN: I’ve got ginger nuts, so pop the kettle on and I’ll give you a tea bag.
FI: Piparia tarjolla. Laittakaa teetä tulemaan. Uitan pussinne!
(Season 4 UK, episode 1)

Example number 7 is a creative combination of polysemy and an idiom. Drag queens often joke about male genitalia and this pun uses a polysemantic word *nuts* and the slang idiom *tea bagging* to refer to testicles. What makes this pun troublesome to translate is the difference in polysemy of the words in English and Finnish. Here the translator has adapted the pun so that it still creates a reference to genitalia, but in a different way than the original. The Finnish pun refers both female and male genitalia since *pipari* means a vagina if it is interpreted as slang and *pussit* can mean testicles. There is also a cultural reference in the original joke, but it is

subtle. *Ginger nut* is a type of biscuit in the UK, so the queen did not only refer to their hair color, but also to a known biscuit type. This reference, however, was omitted in the translation since there is no equivalent in Finnish that would make a reference to nuts or balls. Nonetheless, the translator has done a good job adjusting the pun to fit the Finnish language while also expressing a similar message as the original one. The translation strategies used are *pun to pun* and *omission*. There was also change in the pun category because the Finnish pun is lexical and polysemantic whereas the English one is lexical, polysemantic and idiomatic.

The translation strategies used for lexical puns are *pun to pun* and *pun to non-pun* and the division of those strategies is equal. There were only three puns with cultural references, and they all used a different strategy for the reference. the strategies are *omission*, *equivalence* and *adaptation*.

5.3 Morphological puns

Morphological puns were the least common type in the data since 5 of the 31 examples were based on morphology. Although, these kinds of jokes are based on the exploitation of morphological structures, they also play with phonological and lexical structures quite often. The following example is a case of morphological punning which also includes paronymy:

- (8) EN: Look at her tinkerballs!
FI: Katsokaa hänen kilistimiään!
(Season 4, episode 7)

In number 8 *tinkerballs* is a reference to the fairy outfit a queen is wearing and to *Tinkerbell* (the fairy in *Peter Pan* (1904)). The English pun is a morphological one which has blended *Tinkerbell* + *balls* into one. Its translation is a lexical pun because *kilistimet* is not a modified word, but it can be considered a polysemantic word which can mean balls. *Kilistimet* is an interesting translation though because *kulkuset* is more commonly used as a euphemism for testicles in Finnish. Also, the cultural reference to *Tinkerbell* has been omitted, possibly because the Finnish equivalent of *Tinkerbell*, even if modified, would not have created a similar effect as *Tinkerballs*. Nevertheless, the translator has kept the joke in the form of a pun by referring to testicles in some sense. Thus, the strategies used for pun 8 are *pun to pun* and *omission*.

Interestingly, one translation of a morphological pun resembles the original joke quite perfectly:

- (9) EN: There is an analphylactic shock in room 1.
FI: Huone 1, anaalifylaktinen sokki.
(Season 12, episode 5)

Both puns in case 9 use blends of the words *anal* and *anaphylactic shock*. The translation creates the same morphological effect as the original because the words used are the same. The Finnish words in the blend come originally from English, so they look nearly identical and mean the same in both languages which significantly makes the translation easier. The translation strategy is *pun to pun* and even the pun category remains the same which is rare.

Lastly, there was one case where the joke could have been preserved with a different translation:

- (10) EN: That's what you call a motocross-dresser.
FI: Siinä on motocross-pukeutuja.
(Season 4, episode 1)

The tenth and final example is a blend of *motocross* and *cross-dresser* which has been translated into Finnish literally. The Finnish one is not a pun because *cross-pukeutuja* is not a Finnish term and it does not imply cross-dressing like the English term. However, the pun could have been translated as “Siinä on motoristiinpukeutuja” which is a morphological pun which combines the words *motoristi* ‘motorist’ and *ristiinpukeutuja* ‘cross-dresser’. The pun works even though motorist and motocross do not mean the same, but they sound similar and have something to do with vehicles. In this joke, preserving the reference to cross-dressing is important because drag queens cross-dress in a sense and that is what the joke is about. However, it is impossible to know the motivations of the translator, so the reason behind this translation remains unknown.

Three of the five morphological puns were translated using the *pun to non-pun* strategy and only one of the five included a cultural reference. The pun with the cultural reference was translated by using the *omission* strategy which was common in other cases of cultural references as well. Due to the small number of morphological puns in the data it is unfeasible to draw other valid conclusions regarding morphological puns.

6 Conclusion

The analysis provided some interesting results regarding how common it is to translate a pun into a non-pun, the way the jokes change and potential reasons why those changes occur. Firstly,

the original division of pun categories was 14 phonological puns, 12 lexical puns and 5 morphological puns. However, after being translated the division was 10 lexical puns, 2 morphological puns and 19 non-puns. The phonological pun category disappeared completely in translation making it probably the hardest pun type to translate. Also, non-puns represent ~ 61% of the translations, thus losing the pun aspect of the joke is not uncommon. Overall, 12 puns were translated into pun form and seven of those puns belonged to the same pun category as the original one. This phenomenon was most common in the lexical pun category where 6 of the 12 puns remained as lexical puns.

The most used translation strategy was *pun to non-pun* (from Delabastita's strategies) since 19 of the 31 puns were translated using that strategy. The most used strategy from Tomaszkiweicz's strategies for translating cultural references was *omission*. Only four of the 14 cultural reference puns from the whole data were discussed, above but overall six out of those 14 were translated using the *omission* strategy. The *literal translation* strategy was also common because it was used in five cases. Interestingly, most the puns with cultural references were phonological puns which seemingly was the reason for the omission or literal translation of the references. The translation strategies used in my data did not vary a lot because most of the strategies available for translation were not used. For example, the *editorial techniques*, *pun to zero* or *replacement* strategies were not used at all.

Although pun translations often end up as non-puns, it does not make them less successful. Making a "perfect translation" is often not possible and a good translation does not need to be exactly like the original one. There were cases in the analysis where the words used in the original pun were similar in the target language, which lead to a perfect translation. These types of puns are very rare in the English—Finnish pair at least. Furthermore, sometimes it is simply not feasible to translate a pun into any sort of a joke if the source and target languages are too dissimilar. This was very frequent in the phonological pun category. That was also one of the conclusions of Vuorenlinna (2020), who did a similar study regarding pun translations.

The data used in this study was quite compact, thus no greater conclusion can be drawn. In order to determine if phonological puns, for example, are truly harder to translate into puns than other pun types, more studies must be done within the Finnish—English language pair and with a larger data or there needs to be several smaller studies like this one.

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