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HUMOROUS DISCOURSE IN GERMAN LINGUISTIC CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF CINEMA

This article addresses the question of humor translatability to other languages, namely German to English, in the context of the German-language movie library available on Netflix. Due to the elusive and subjective nature of humor, especially viewed through the eyes of a non-native German speaker, it was decided to approach the research task at hand using the General Verbal Theory of Humor, developed by Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo. The latter allows the comparison of humor's likeness in the source and target language texts, using the six knowledge resources: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy, and Language. This theory is the result of years of research conducted by American humor researchers Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo and a second iteration of the original script-based semantic theory of humor.

Raskin's original 1985 work "Semantic Mechanisms of Humor" presented the first linguistic theory of humor and introduced the notion of scripts from psycholinguistics, as well as the opposition of scripts, both of which will be covered in more detail in this article. As it pertains to this research, the focus is placed on humor translation and the differences between source language and target language texts from the point of view of the General Verbal Theory of Humor.

Humor is translated and conveyed from one language and culture to another every day, as evidenced by the variety of existing versions of movies in the world, most notably Hollywood films, which occupy a dominant space in the movie industry. German movies, while far less prevalent and popular than their American counterparts, also offer several language variants that can be accessed through the user menu on Netflix.

The research findings suggest that the General Theory of Humor could be used as an alternative to more traditional translation studies-based strategies, some of which include literal translation, substitution, and omission, as means to compare the source language text to the target language text. As humor is notoriously subjective, the most important quality it carries is the ability to make an individual laugh or smile (its perlocution). Further research may employ statistical and sociological tools to evaluate the "quality" of humor on different target audiences, especially different language speakers.

Key words: *audiovisual translation, humor discourse, communicative behavior, German linguistic culture, intertextuality, semantics, semantic script.*

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ГУМОРИСТИЧНИЙ ДИСКУРС В НІМЕЦЬКІЙ ЛІНГВОКУЛЬТУРІ В КОНТЕКСТІ КІНО

У цій статті розглядається проблематика перекладу гумору іншими мовами, а саме з німецької на англійську, в контексті німецькомовної бібліотеки фільмів, доступної на Netflix. Через невловиму та суб'єктивну природу гумору, особливо з точки зору носія німецької мови як іноземної, було вирішено підійти до поставленого дослідницького завдання, використовуючи Загальну теорію вербального гумору, розроблену Віктором Раскіним та Сальваторе Аттардо. Вона дозволяє порівнювати подібність гумору в текстах мови оригіналу та мови перекладу за допомогою шести ключових ресурсів: Опозиції скриптів, Логічного механізму, Ситуації, Цілі, Наративної стратегії та Мови. Ця теорія є результатом багаторічних досліджень гумору, проведених американськими дослідниками Віктором Раскіним і Сальваторе Аттардо, та другою переглянутою версією початкової теорії гумору, заснованої на семантичних скриптах.

Первинна праця В. Раскіна 1985 року «Семантичні механізми гумору» представила першу лінгвістичну теорію гумору і ввела поняття скрипту, а також опозиції скриптів з психолінгвістики. Обидва терміни будуть більш детально розглянуті в цій статті. У рамках цього дослідження, основну увагу приділено перекладу гумору та відмінностям між текстами мови оригіналу та мови перекладу з точки зору Загальної вербальної теорії гумору.

Гумор зазнає перекладу з однієї мови і перенесенню з однієї культури в іншу щодня, про що свідчить розмаїття доступних версій фільмів у світі, особливо голлівудських, які займають домінантну позицію у кіноіндустрії. Німецькі фільми, хоча й набагато менш поширені та популярні, ніж їхні американські аналоги, також пропонують кілька мовних варіантів, які можна вибрати у користувацькому меню на Netflix. Об'єктом для інтересу видається не просто існування цих багатомовних версій, а аналіз їхньої подібності.

Здобуті результати дослідження свідчать про те, що Загальна теорія гумору може бути використана як альтернатива більш традиційним перекладознавчим стратегіям, серед яких дослівний переклад, заміна та опущення, як засіб для порівняння тексту вихідної мови з текстом цільової мови. Оскільки гумор, як відомо, суб'єктивний, найважливішою його властивістю є здатність викликати сміх або посмішку (перлокутивна функція). Подальші дослідження можуть звернутись до статистичних та соціологічних інструментів для оцінки «якості» гумору для різних цільових аудиторій, особливо носіїв різних мов.

Ключові слова: аудіовізуальний переклад, гумористичний дискурс, комунікативна поведінка, німецька лінгвокультура, інтертекстуальність, семантика, семантичний скрипт.

Problem statement. Given the scope of this research, it will become evident that humor translation, or audiovisual translation, employed in the process is not only possible but can also be successful, as proven by a multitude of movies, series, and their translations available across various platforms. This research, however, will focus on German-language comedies available on Netflix in Germany with the rationale based on the relative availability and popularity of Netflix and its support for different languages.

Research analysis. The multifaceted phenomenon of humor has captivated the minds of philosophers, historians, psychologists, and linguists for millennia, and the discourse of humor research is steadily growing. In particular, humor researchers seem to have reached a consensus on the categorization of humor theories, explaining the nature of humor, namely: the superiority (or hostility) theories, relief (or release) theories, and incongruity theories, according to J. Morreal and V. Raskin (Dore, 2020: 17).

According to the proponents of the Superiority (or Hostility) Theories, who included Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Hobbes, we laugh at others due to considering ourselves superior (disparagement). Humor is seen as aggressive and as a tool to correct socially unacceptable behavior (Raskin 1985: 39; Dore 2020: 18).

Among the Relief (or Release) Theories proponents were Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, who saw humor as a way to liberate oneself from the conventions imposed by society, associating laughter with the process of suppression of libido or hostile feelings (Raskin 1985: 39; Dore 2020: 18).

The Incongruity Theories proponents, like Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, James Beattie, and more recently, Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo, argue that humor results from the resolution of incongruity between expectation and reality or two clashing ideas, whose meaning are opposed to each other (Raskin 1985: 39; Dore 2020: 18).

Victor Raskin, a linguist, and semiotician defines humor as *"a universal human trait"* since *"the ability to appreciate and enjoy humor is universal and shared by all people, even if the kinds of humor they favor differ widely"* (Raskin 1985: 2). The kind of humor under scrutiny here is verbal humor or humor expressed via language, although it can be accompanied by various linguistic, paraverbal and non-verbal markers, such as voice, pitch, pauses, mimic, or even features like smiling and gazes (Dore 2020: 15).

As this article deals with the translation of humor, or rather the audiovisual translation of humorous contexts, derived from German language movies on Netflix, the list of which will be provided further, it should be noted that the translation of any humorous text from Source Language (hereinafter: SL) into Target Language (hereinafter: TL) is problematic on many levels. Should translators attempt to provide a literal translation of humor from SL into TL, it may result in failure since humor tends to include culture-specific allusions that may not be present in the target culture (Dore 2020: 39). Another problem occurs when the humor is based on linguistic ambiguities such as puns or puns based on idioms, that may render the humor untranslatable into TL (Dore 2020: 40).

Yet, there is a growing pool of humorous texts that are translated every day, supported here by the mere fact of the existence of English-language subtitles to the analyzed German comedy movies, and some may argue that select translations could even provide for a stronger humorous effect than the original. As Delia Chiaro put it, *"Humor discourse, which is naturally impeded by linguistic and social barriers, actually succeeds in crossing geographical frontiers [...] humorous texts are indeed translated no matter what"* (Chiaro 2005: 135–136).

Some humor researchers, like Dirk Delabastita, Anne Leibold, and Raymond Hickey, proposed using a pragmatically oriented approach to humor translation, whereby the translator would aim to produce a TL text with an analogous effect to the SL, thus amusing the receivers, making them laugh or reaching a different intended result. To reach this, the translator needs to identify linguistic features or mechanisms used to create the humorous incongruity in the SL text

(f.e., punning, using culture-specific references) and render them into a TL text, using the original mechanisms and, if necessary, semantic elements. As for the methodology of doing so, let's refer to V. Raskin's and S. Attardo's General Verbal Theory of Humor.

Firstly, it should be noted that the General Verbal Theory of Humor is the second iteration of the Semantic Script Theory of Humor, originally developed as the first linguistic theory of humor by the aforementioned Victor Raskin in 1985. In the original Raskin's theory, the author introduces the notion of a "Script" or a "Frame" from Cognitive Psychology and Psycholinguistics, defined as *"[...] an organized complex of information about something, in the broadest sense: an object (real or imaginary), an event, an action, a quality, etc. It is a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how the world is organized, including how one acts in it"* (Raskin 1985: 99; Attardo 2002: 181). According to Raskin's hypothesis, a text can be classified as a single-joke-carrying-text if two conditions are met:

1. The text is compatible, either fully or partially, with two different scripts.

2. The two scripts with which the text is compatible are contradictory or opposite to each other (Raskin 1985: 99)

The overlap between scripts can be full, meaning that the text is fully compatible with two scripts, or partial, when some parts of the text may not be compatible with a particular script. As the overlapping of two scripts alone may not be the cause of humor, the second condition provides for the oppositeness of these scripts, which can be viewed as local antonymy (Attardo 2002: 182).

The revised GVTH offers five new parameters for verbal humor analysis on top of script opposition, known as Knowledge Resources, that are situated in a hierarchical order from the most to the least important: Script Oppositions (SOs), Logical Mechanisms (LMs), Situations (SI), Target (TA), Narrative Strategy (NS), and Language (LA) (Attardo 2002: 176).

Starting from the bottom of the hierarchy, LA is a knowledge resource containing all the information on the verbalization of a given joke in text, for example, wording and the placement of functional elements, such as the connector (an ambiguous element before the punchline) and the punchline (the culmination of a joke revealing the ambiguity). According to Attardo, the punchline and connector may coincide, making the connector the punchline of a verbal joke (Attardo 2002: 177).

The NS accounts for the narrative organization of the joke, be it a narrative, a dialogue, a pseudo-riddle, or an aside in conversation (Attardo 2002: 178)

The TA parameter points at the groups or individuals that serve as an object for humor or the "butt" of the joke. In non-aggressive humor, this knowledge resource may have an empty value, but in the opposite case, it usually targets living things, prevalently individuals or groups of individuals, as one can hardly be aggressive toward a non-living object. The choice of targets in a joke is often influenced by the existence of particular stereotypes in the source culture (Attardo 2002: 178–179).

The SI is simply the topic and props pertaining to a humorous text, including information on the participants, instruments, activities, etc. (Attardo 2002: 179).

The LM knowledge resource embodies the resolution of incongruity, presupposing a local, playful logic, which the speakers are aware of and willing to go along with it in the spirit of non-bona-fide communication (Attardo 2002: 180). The latter is a type of communication used intentionally by the speaker to convey information that is not to meant to be taken literally or seriously.

Finally, the SO is the most important knowledge resource in a joke-carrying text, as described previously, and any humorous text will present one or several script oppositions, which can be prevalent in some cultures, and non-existent or a matter of taboo in others.

Based on these six knowledge resources, Attardo claims that any translation of a humorous text from SL into TL should also attempt to keep as many of the knowledge resources intact as possible if not all of them. However, if changes are to be made, it is best to keep them to the lower-hierarchy knowledge resources, such as Language, as any change of higher-tier elements of the joke will result in substantial differences, and a change of the opposing scripts will render a new joke entirely (Attardo 2002: 184).

The following sections of the article will provide a comparison and analysis of the German (SL) and English (TL) humorous texts, sourced directly from the subtitles to a number of German comedies available at the date of writing on Netflix.

The aim of the article. This article aims to define and analyze the constituting elements of humor in the chosen contexts from German-language comedy movies and analyze their English translation using the General Verbal Theory of Humor by V. Raskin and S. Attardo as a method to compare the two versions, and define their similarities and differences, according to the GVTH's hierarchical knowledge resources.

Statement of basic materials. For the purposes of this research, it was decided to turn to the German

language movie library available at the time of writing this article for several reasons, the first being the popularity of the Netflix platform worldwide, and the second, the availability of multiple-language versions of the content available. To accommodate for the most authentic experience, a Virtual Private Network (VPN) service was used to access the German library. After reviewing several open-access online sources, offering lists of German-language comedy movies (co)produced in Germany, the most comprehensive list was found on MoviePilot, which is a German fan-centric online magazine covering the film industry based in Berlin (MoviePilot 2023).

What resulted from the search is a list of 124 titles produced between 1990 and now, which was further broken down into two categories, single-language (German) versions of the movies and multiple-language versions, all under the umbrella of the "Comedy (ger. Komödie)" genre.

Out of all 124 movies on the list (see the footnote), 3 were no longer available on the platform (2,4%), 23 had English subtitles with no English dubbing (18,55%), and 8 supported more than two languages, including dubbing (6,45%), the latter two categories combined made up 25% of the list. Given the spatial limitations of the article and its goal to analyze the verbal humorous contexts, the main focus was devoted to the second category.

In the following section, V. Raskin and S. Attardo's General Verbal Theory of Humor will be applied to analyze and compare three chosen episodes from three German movies within the Comedy genre. The contexts under scrutiny were carefully sourced as humorous contexts or joke-carrying texts, after Raskin, from the first 25 minutes of each film's runtime and will be presented with minimal bias on the author's part and in no particular order, employing the Captioning mode of Audiovisual translation (see Dore 2020: 74 for a detailed classification of Audiovisual translation modes):

1. Freundschaft! ("Friendship!"): *"When the Berlin Wall collapses, a young man and his best friend set out for San Francisco to search for his father, who fled East Germany years before"* (Friendship! 2010: 6:15 – 7:48).

The humor in this episode stems from the American stereotypes of Germans in the 1990s and the political ignorance of two young tourists from East Germany who arrived at an American airport and naively presented themselves as "free communists" at the passport control, completely oblivious of the fact that the United States had been at Cold War with the Soviet Union and a lot of Americans saw communists as their enemy, which resulted in the two German

SL (German)	TL (English)
Immigration Officer: Reisepass Tourist 1: Freundschaft. Tourist 2: Freundschaft. Immigration Officer: Deutschland? Tourist 1: Ja. Tourist 2: Ja. Immigration Officer: Seid ihr Nazis? Tourist 1: Nein. Keine Nazis. Tourist 2: Wir. Kommunisten. Freie Kommunisten. Tourist 1: Ja? Frei. Frei. Immigration Officer: Kommunisten? […] Tourist 1: Scheiß auf Kommunisten. Tourist 2: Undurchdacht. […] Tourist 1: Willkommen in Amerika.	- Paperwork. - Friendship. - Friendship. - Germany, huh? - Yes. - Yes. - You're a Nazi? - No, no. No Nazi. - We are communists, you know? Free communists. - Yes? Free. Free. - Communists? […] - I hate those darn commies. - A little unwise, huh? […] - Welcome to America.

SL (German)	TL (English)
SO: "Free" vs. "Communists" LM: Faulty reasoning SI: Passing passport control at an airport in New York, USA TA: Tourists from East Germany NS: Dialogue LA: the connector coincides with the punchline: "Willkommen in Amerika"	SO 1: "Free" vs. "Communists" LM 1: Faulty reasoning SI: Passing passport control at an airport in New York, USA TA: Tourists from East Germany NS: Dialogue LA: the connector coincides with the punchline: "Welcome to America"

tourists taken into custody for a full inspection of their belongings.

The translation of the context above appears to honor all six out of six knowledge resources, keeping the placement of the functional elements of humor intact. A detailed linguistic analysis of the context from the point of view of translation studies, while potentially useful for a thorough understanding of translation strategies used, falls outside of the scope of this research.

2. Die Goldfische ("The Goldfish"): *"After high-powered banker Oliver's reckless driving puts him in a wheelchair, he hatches a scheme with new friends to save himself from financial ruin"* (The Goldfish 2019: 20:42 – 21:38).

This episode shows an interaction between Laura, the Rehabilitogist, overseeing the small group of patients, referred to as the Goldfish (hence the name of the movie), and the protagonist Oliver, who wears

SL (German)	TL (English)
Laura: Noch was. Ich wollte noch klarstellen, dass das nichts mit deiner Gehbehinderung zu tun hatte. Oliver: Was?	Also, just so you know, it had nothing to do with your disability.
Laura: Dass ich nicht mit dir zum "Yupitari" wollte. Oliver: Yakitori. Aber passt schon.	What? That I didn't want to come to "Yupitari" with you.
Laura: Nein, ich mache das ernst. Der Rollstuhl ist für mich kein Problem. Oliver: Ok. Was dann?	Yakitori. But that's okay. No, I'm serious, I don't mind the wheelchair. Okay. Then what?
Laura: Nimm's nicht persönlich, aber du bist halt nicht mein Typ. Oliver: Was bin ich denn für ein Typ?	Don't take it personally, but you're not my type. What type am I?
Laura: Ein Bänker halt. Oliver: Kein Bänker, ich bin Portfoliomanager.	A thinker. I'm not a thinker, I'm a portfolio manager.
Laura: Weil das so anders ist. Was soll das für ein Beruf sein? Reiche noch reicher machen? Oliver: Ich kenne die Klischees.	Oh, big difference. What kind of job is this anyway? Enrich the rich? Please, stop the lecture. I know the cliché.

a suit and tries to work out of the rehabilitation center, despite his physical condition, as to keep his job as Portfolio Manager. The humor stems from Laura's lack of understanding of the difference between a banker and a portfolio manager, as in her eyes, neither is a "real job", as both only exist "to enrich the rich".

SL (German)	TL (English)
SO 1: "Yupitari" vs. "Yaki-tori" LM: meta-humor SI: A conversation between the protagonist and his romantic interest TA: - NS: Dialogue LA: the connector coincides with the punchline: "Yakitori"	SO 1: "Yupitari" vs. "Yakitori" LM: meta-humor SI: A conversation between the protagonist and his romantic interest TA: - NS: Dialogue LA: the connector coincides with the punchline: "Yakitori"
SO 2: "Bänker" vs. "Portfolio Manager" LM: reasoning from false premise; false analogy TA: Oliver NS: Dialogue LA: the connector coincides with the punchline: "Weil das so anders ist. Was soll das für ein Beruf sein? Reiche noch reicher machen?"	SO 2: "Thinker" vs. "Portfolio Manager" LM: reasoning from false premise; false analogy TA: Oliver NS: Dialogue LA: the connector coincides with the punchline: "Oh, big difference. What kind of job is this anyway? Enrich the rich?"

The analysis of this context is two-fold: the first instance of humor occurs when Laura mistakenly calls the Japanese traditional grilled skewered chicken dish called Yakitori for "Yupitari", which is a clear example of a receiver of the message lacking a particular script, in this case, Yakitori, which leads to a misunderstanding. The logical mechanism here goes beyond the semantic meaning of the word and calls for a certain element of cultural (meta) knowledge. The target is arguably missing here, although it could be argued that the speaker is the target, as the speaker lacks meta-knowledge of a specific Japanese dish. Translation-wise, the TL version appears to honor six out of six knowledge resources, keeping the functional elements of humor intact.

The second part of the context presents a script opposition between a Bänker ("banker") and "a portfolio manager", which the translator(s) mistakenly interpret(s) as a Denker ("thinker"), most likely due to the similar pronunciation. Although five out of six knowledge resources are successfully transferred from SL into TL, the difference in the Script Opposition between the two humorous contexts effectively renders the translation false.

3. Nebenan ("Next Door"): *"A successful actor on his way to an important audition is stopped in his tracks when a former East German spy corners him in a local pub"* (Nebenan 2021: 7:13 – 7:41).

SL (German)	TL (English)
Daniel: Moin. Moin Madame: (Wirtin, berlinert) Wenn das mal nicht Tom Cruise ist. Na, Meister, wieder auf Weltreise?	Top of the morning. If it ain't Tom Cruise. Off on another world trip, Squire?
Daniel: Messerscharf beobachtet. Madame: Ich wünschte, ich hätte so viel Urlaub.	What powers of observation. I wish I took that many vacations.
Daniel: Das ist das Gegenteil von Urlaub, Madame. Madame: Meister, manche würden sagen, dein ganzes Leben ist Urlaub.	It's the opposite of a vacation, Madame. Some would say your life is one big holiday, Squire.

In this episode, the movie protagonist, a successful actor Daniel, goes to his favorite bar in Berlin, Germany, where he seems to be a local, just before leaving for an audition for a new movie in London. As he enters the bar, he greets the hostess, referred to here as Madame, and she calls him Tom Cruise. The latter is an example of intertextuality in humor, as not only is the protagonist an actor, who ironically, also plays an actor, but he is also called Tom Cruise, after a real-life Hollywood action movie superstar, which might be a

reference to the "Mission Impossible" (1996–2023), starring Tom Cruise in the lead role. The names "Meister" or "Squire" in the English version might be a literary reference of unknown origin, also an example of intertextuality, which doesn't appear prevalent in the German linguistic culture due to its archaic nature, so it's possible that the use here is ironic.

The humor in this context stems from the opposition between "working as an actor" and "being on vacation", which Madame sees as the same thing. The GVTH analysis is as follows:

SL (German)	TL (English)
SO: "Meister… auf Weltreise" vs. "Urlaub" LM: false analogy SI: conversation in a bar TA: - NS: dialogue LA: the connector: "Ich wünschte, ich hätte so viel Urlaub." the punchline: "Meister, manche würden sagen, dein ganzes Leben ist Urlaub	SO: "Squire… on a world trip" vs. "Vacation" LM: false analogy SI: conversation in a bar TA: - NS: dialogue LA: the connector: "I wish I took that many vacations." the punchline: "Some would say your life is one big holiday, Squire."

The GVTH analysis of this humorous context may appear troublesome, as it presents the receiver with an atypical script for the German linguistic culture, "Meister," and arguably even less typical script "Squire," which might be more prevalent in the British English Linguistic Culture, than in the American Linguistic Culture. The hypothesis here is that the script "Squire" was used in the SL text as it may have been thought to be more familiar to the English-speaking target audience than "Master," a literal translation from the German "Meister".

Following the hierarchical structure of knowledge resources from LA to SO, the functional elements of humor appear to be intact, although the differences in the script opposition may render the SL version into a fully different humorous text, depending on the humor recipient's meta-knowledge of the references presented here.

The findings of the research point to the need for a further interdisciplinary study of cultural and intertextual references in German-language comedy movies, employing comparative linguistics, cultural studies, and translation studies for a better understanding of how different cultures, in this case, German linguistic culture and British English and American English linguistic cultures perceive scripts that may exist beyond the area of common knowledge.

Conclusions. This article offered a research methodology based on Victor Raskin's and Salvatore Attardo's General Verbal Theory of Humor that can serve as an alternative tool for analyzing humor-carrying texts in audiovisual mediums such as feature films to the traditional comparative language studies and translation strategies within the realm of translation studies.

The discourse of humor studies and humor translation is steadily growing and expanding with more theoretical knowledge and its applications, a small part of which was presented here from the viewpoint of Script Theory and General Verbal Theory of Humor. The latter has shown itself as an efficient tool for comparing source language and target language humor-carrying texts, thanks to its hierarchical knowledge resources: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy, and Language.

Holding true to the theory authors' claims, the research has shown the importance of keeping the changes to the lower-hierarchy knowledge resources, such as the wording and the placement of functional elements of the connector and punchline in the Language knowledge resource, as any changes of the Logical Mechanism and Script Opposition would make the humor in the target text unrelated to its counterpart in the source language text.

It should be noted that the GVTH version used in this research does not resemble the theory to its fullest due to the physical and space limitations of this article. Still, it was attempted to focus on the main ideas of the theory while demonstrating its real-life application in the context of German-language comedy films, thus bringing the theory out of the traditional English-language humor discourse.

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