Translation of Humorous Language in *The Big Bang Theory* Sitcom

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, improved living standards and advancements in mass media have made movies and TV dramas central to entertainment, with foreign productions, especially American dramas, gaining popularity in China. Their high-quality production and humor attract viewers, but cultural and linguistic nuances often challenge understanding. This has led to the rise of subtitle translation as a bridge between cultural and language gaps. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the translation of humorous language in the American sitcom The Big Bang Theory with two objectives: (i) to identify the humorous language used in the sitcom and (ii) to examine the translation procedures employed to translate the humorous language. This qualitative study adopts content analysis and comparative analysis to achieve these objectives. The framework includes the types of humor categorised by Schmitz (2002) and translation procedures by Newmark (1988). The findings reveal that 159 items of humorous language found in the sitcom can be categorised into three types: (i) universal humor, (ii) culture-based humor, and (iii) linguistic humor. Universal humor is the most prevalent, accounting for 145 occurrences (91.61%), while culture-based humor is the least frequent, with only four items (2.52%). The translation of humor in The Big Bang Theory uses procedures like paraphrasing, cultural equivalence, transference, label, notes, gloss, and functional equivalence to convey humor across cultures. These strategies adapt the text to target language norms, preserve cultural elements, and clarify complex concepts, ensuring the humor remains effective and relevant for the audience. It is hoped that this study will enhance the field of translation studies by offering a detailed examination of translation procedures used for humorous language in popular media, helping to bridge the gap between linguistic and cultural differences in humor translation.

Keywords: Humor, Sitcom, Humorous Language, Translation Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Humor in film, especially in sitcoms, is a powerful tool that fosters connection, evokes laughter, and communicates universal and culturally specific ideas, (Gibson, 2019). Sitcoms, with their blend of witty dialogue, situational comedy, and character-driven humor, often reflect the cultures from which they emerge. The unique social, cultural, and linguistic contexts of the country of origin influence the humor embedded in these shows.

With the rise of globalization, many sitcoms created for one market, such as the United States, are now broadcast across the globe, including in Asian countries. This widespread distribution of television content has made it necessary for humor to be adapted for diverse audiences, as the cultural nuances and references in American sitcoms may not easily resonate with viewers from different cultural backgrounds.

The proportion of foreign sitcoms in China's film and TV drama market is gradually increasing (Wang, 2011), resulting in a preference to watch dramas close to one's daily life. The dramas are often light-hearted and humorous, and people of all ages widely enjoy such expressions. Sitcoms reflecting the everyday life of different countries also blossom to meet the aesthetic requirements of different people.

Young people in China are the primary audience for American TV series. They tend to be open to new ideas and

accept diverse cultures. Moreover, the widespread implementation of compulsory education has equipped them with a basic understanding of English (Liu & Jiang, 2022).

The Big Bang Theory, one of China's most popular American sitcoms, exemplifies this phenomenon. The show, filled with intellectual jokes and references to American pop culture, has gained a large audience in China and other parts of Asia (Wang, 2011). The unique characteristic of this sitcom is the humorous language it contains.

However, since American sitcoms are primarily tailored for viewers in Western cultures, non-Western audiences often face challenges in fully appreciating them. Many obscure words and culturally specific expressions in the original dialogue reflect the characters' uniqueness, but these nuances are better understood by those sharing the same cultural background. There is a great need for subtitle translation to bridge the gap between two different cultures and languages.

With the growing popularity of foreign films and television shows in China, the increasing exchange of movies and TV programs has also fostered cultural interaction. However, most Chinese audiences cannot directly comprehend foreign films and TV series (Shia & Yu, 2021).

Due to varying levels of English proficiency among the audience, most Chinese viewers rely on Chinese subtitles to comprehend the plotlines of American dramas and gain insights into Western cultures. Significant differences exist between English and Chinese in terms of expression, customs, and value orientations. The cultural contexts and daily experiences of China and Western countries differ significantly, making it difficult for Chinese viewers to grasp unfamiliar customs and traditions (Jing et.al, 2022). Consequently, most Chinese audiences rely on Chinese subtitles for comprehension (Wang, 2011), highlighting the need for accurate and effective translation.

Achieving this is no small feat, as the primary goal is to retain the original humour. Therefore, translation is crucial in transferring the humour in sitcoms to help the target audience understand and appreciate it, ensuring that the essence of the humour remains intact while being culturally relevant to the viewers.

In subtitle translation of sitcoms, the main task is to evoke humorous effects for the target audience, which is crucial for the success of translation (Mohamad Zakuan, 2021). Sitcoms are then well worthy of study, telling us much about television and its audience, contemporary society and social change, not to mention the meaning of life itself, no less (Wickham, 2004).

The objective of the subtitles in The Big Bang Theory is to help Chinese viewers better understand the dialogue and cultural context in American sitcoms, thereby achieving an experience comparable to that of American audiences. Therefore, this paper discusses the translation procedures used in translating humorous language in The Big Bang Theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sitcoms

Watching television is an important part of our daily life. One television format that is increasingly popular is the sitcom (Köhne, 2012). Sitcom simply means comedy arising from a situation (Wickham, 2004) or 'situation comedy' (Köhne. 2012) with a particular group of characters (Stafford, 2004) based on situations that could arise in everyday life (Stafford, 2004; Wickham, 2004; Köhne. 2012). One episode usually lasts 25-30 minutes (Stafford 2004). Television sitcoms, despite being a genre often surrounded by critical debate, have achieved immense success in terms of ratings and have also given rise to some highly creative and influential programs that stand out as milestones in television history (Wickham, 2004).

Generally, a sitcom has six features. The features are (i) the main casts and the environment in a sitcom are usually fixed where these characters or the performance places do not change, (ii) the main theme of sitcoms centers around people's daily lives, (iii) in one episode there is always one story finished, which means the plot and does not have implications for the next episode, (iv) in a sitcom there are usually three cast groups which are regular casts who are the main casts through all episodes, (v) the essence of the sitcom, originated from radio comedy, is an art of language which pushes the plot to carry on, and (vi) in one episode there are usually four or

five scenes with main scenes directed indoors (Zou, 2019).

The best sitcoms take us on a journey where their characters and situations mirror the experience of life itself. The nature of sitcoms, with its long runs and emphasis on the comic rather than dramatic, means they match the rhythms of everyday existence. It is no coincidence that most comedies have been based around the family or the workplace, as these are common experiences for almost all (Wickham, 2004).

There are some motives because people like watching sitcoms. A study by Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) shows that six out of nine factors have an interpretable influence on media use motives. They are entertainment, relaxation, habitual pass time, companionship, social interaction, and voyeurism.

When people watch sitcoms, they develop a sense of connection with the characters, often feeling as though they are part of the characters' lives. However, unlike real-life interactions, watching TV requires no active engagement, sharing, or contribution. In essence, viewing a sitcom allows individuals to feel included in a social group without the need for participation (Köhne, 2012). Thus, it is easy and not challenging to follow a sitcom. Humour and comedy can reduce daily stress and can be helpful for people to relax and to get away from work-day life. The viewer can be passive and just have fun (Köhne, 2012).

Humour

The Oxford English Dictionary (2022) defines humour as "the quality of action, speech, or writing that evokes amusement; including oddity, jocularity, facetiousness, comicality, and fun." It further describes humour as "the ability to perceive what is ludicrous or amusing, or to convey it through speech, writing, or other forms of expression, involving a jocose imagination or approach to a subject."

These definitions make it clear that humour is a broad concept encompassing anything people say or do that is perceived as funny and elicits laughter. It also includes the cognitive processes involved in creating and understanding such stimuli, as well as the emotional response associated with enjoying them. The term "humour" today serves as a broad concept with a generally positive and socially appealing connotation. It encompasses anything people say or do that is considered amusing and elicits laughter or joy in others. Interestingly, this expansive meaning of humour is a relatively recent development (Gibson, 2019).

Humour is a concept of the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to induce laughter and deliver amusement. According to Norris and Chiaro (2010), the term humour is derived from a medical term used by the ancient Greeks, which taught that the balance of fluids in the human body, known as humour (which means body fluids in Latin), is controlled by human health and emotion (Yeo, 2017).

Humour has various faces and forms, deriving from double meanings, situations, and wordplay, often with hidden or obvious cultural references. It may also be subjective; the same things may seem humorous for some people and not funny for others. Most translators would probably agree that translating humour is a very challenging task, especially when it is strictly related to the language itself or a certain culture or community (Kovács, 2020).

Humour can be created through verbal elements (Chiaro, 2009), non-verbal elements (body movements and facial expressions), linguistic elements (wordplay, irony, insults, and others), cultural elements (specific cultural references), sitcoms, satires, parodies, and more. Humour can also be generated individually or through a combination of several types of humour (Sierra & Zabalbeascoa Terran, 2006).

Humour is increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for public health professionals to enhance health communication and foster community engagement in health promotion campaigns (Miller et al., 2021). Research indicates that messages combining strong threats with humour are more persuasive than those that are less threatening or devoid of humour (Mukherjee & Dubé, 2012). This effectiveness has made humour a prominent strategy in health communication (Hendriks & Janssen, 2018). However, in the Chinese context, Han (2021) observes that the integration of threat and humour is perceived as formal and serious, leaving little room for light-heartedness. These messages are often presented on long red banners displayed along roadsides or in public spaces, typically bearing the local government's signature in the bottom right corner (Han, 2021).

Ziv (1988) and Davies (2002) emphasize the cross-cultural significance of humour analysis by examining how different societies approach humour related to men, women, and children. Through content analysis of popular jokes from various countries, they demonstrate that humour usage varies across cultures and that these differences are indirectly influenced by factors such as technological advancements and literacy rates.

Although different cultures have their norms concerning the suitable subject matter of humour and the types of situations in which laughter is considered appropriate, the sounds of laughter are indistinguishable from one culture to another (Gibson, 2019).

The inclusion of humour in a film, a sitcom or any other artistic form is to ensure that such a work has a happy ending, amuses (comedy), entertains the audience, or even criticizes a certain societal behaviour in a friendly manner (satirical). However, humour can only be appreciated by the audience if it has the intellectual development that is required to grasp the contextual knowledge of the humorous connotation (Baltag, 2021).

Translation of Humour

The concept of humour is not a new idea that has been scientifically discussed. The study of humour began to emerge as an academic discipline as early as the mid-1970s and has since been incorporated into discussions across various fields such as health, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics (Norris & Chiaro, 2009). Humour's interdisciplinary appeal highlights its significance in understanding human behaviour, communication, and social interactions.

Despite its importance in many areas of human experience, the translation industry in China has surprisingly paid little attention to this subject. The limited focus on humour in translation underscores a gap in recognizing its role in cross-cultural communication. Research on humour translation typically receives scant mention. However, over the years, there has been a steady accumulation of studies on the topic, resulting in a sizable body of knowledge. This growing interest reflects the realisation of humour's complexity and its importance in facilitating cultural exchange.

The humour genre has become a significant focus in audiovisual translation studies. Initially, humour translation research was neglected and dominated by studies on wordplay in literary texts (Chiaro, 2009). However, this field has now gained prominence, becoming an essential branch of audiovisual translation studies (Sierra & Zabalbescoa Terran, 2016). As Perego (2016) points out, audiovisual translation serves as a bridge between two languages and acts as a valuable specialized tool.

Subtitling, which involves transferring spoken elements into written form, plays a significant role in conveying messages in audiovisual products to audiences. Gottlieb (2005) defines subtitling as transferring verbal messages in film media into another language, displayed on the screen in text form, simultaneously with the original dialogue.

Antonini (2005) identifies three key strategies for effective subtitling: elimination, rendering, and simplification. He also notes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach; rather, the selection of a strategy should depend on factors such as its relevance to the storyline, connotations (including any implicit information), assumptions about the target audience's knowledge of the language and culture of the source text, feedback effects, and constraints associated with the medium of delivery.

The representation of humour in audiovisual texts often challenges translators due to the diverse forms of humour and their cultural implications. Braga and Logan (2023) describe humour as encompassing various forms of jokes and aspects of human behaviour such as fun, satire, and amusement. Representing these features in both the source and target texts can be difficult.

Afsari et al. (2018) highlight that translating humour and its effects is one of the most challenging tasks for translators due to cultural clashes between the source language and target language. Jalali (2023) emphasizes that wordplay, often a core element in humorous texts, is among the most complex aspects of translation, requiring an understanding of its types and strategies for effective handling. Wordplay, frequently used in movies

and series, adds humour to the narrative but also poses significant challenges for translators.

In translation studies, humour is often considered problematic due to its reliance on cultural nuances. Translators must navigate the various forms of humour present in the source text and identify what is humorous within the target culture (Yeo, 2017). In sitcoms, translators need to understand the culture of the source society to recognize humour portrayed by the original author. Equally important is their understanding of the target culture to determine what humour is acceptable, including awareness of taboo topics or boundaries set by authorities (Yeo, 2017). Explicit or taboo humour poses additional challenges as it intersects with issues of cultural acceptance and audience sensitivities (Mohamad Zakuan, 2021).

Humour translation challenges also arise from the nature of humour itself. A study by Ghajarieh, Mozaheb and Ghaziyani (2024) explores translanguaging and audiovisual materials to teach Iranian EFL students of Arab ethnicity to understand and translate English wordplay. Focusing on TV shows like Friends and The Simpsons, the study reveals those strategies such as lexical-semantic wordplay and "no wordplay" are common but often result in inappropriate translations. However, translanguaging using audiovisual materials significantly improved students' understanding of wordplay, demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach for language learning.

Despite the challenges, collaborative thinking and creative decision-making can lead to successful humour translations, even in culturally sensitive contexts (Elaheh & Ali, 2015). Humour enriches narratives, develops characters, and engages audiences.

However, in cross-cultural contexts, humour often relies on specific cultural references or linguistic nuances, creating a delicate balance for translators between preserving the original intent and adapting the content for global audiences. While humour transcends borders to foster connections, its translation remains a complex and rewarding endeavour for linguists and translators.

Kovačič (in Georgakopoulou, 2009:26) established three hierarchies for determining subtitle translation strategies, namely:

1.   indispensable elements (must be translated);

2.   partly dispensable elements (can be summarized); and,

3.   dispensable elements (can be omitted).

In subtitle translation from English to Chinese, it is common for English subtitles to be longer than their Chinese counterparts, owing to differences in their writing systems and syntactic structures.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study analyses the translation of humorous language in an American sitcom, The Big Bang Theory. Types of humorous language by Schmitz (2002) will be used to identify types of humorous language in the sitcom. According to Schmitz (2002) humour can be classified into three types, (i) universal or reality-based humour, (ii) culture-based humour, and (iii) linguistic or word-based humour.

Universal humour, also known as reality-based humour, refers to humorous events or scenes that can be understood and appreciated by people across different countries and cultural backgrounds. It often achieves its comedic effect through rhetorical techniques such as exaggeration, contradiction, and harmonic arguments. Unlike culturally specific humour, universal humour is not influenced by cultural nuances; instead, it is rooted in shared physical and psychological experiences common to all human beings (Schmitz, 2002).

Culture-based humour is humour rooted in cultural backgrounds, encompassing elements such as history, customs, traditions, and social systems. It often appears in the form of idioms, proverbs, and other culturally specific expressions. This type of humour reflects national characteristics and is deeply tied to the cultural realities of a particular group. Since cultures vary significantly across countries and communities, understanding

and appreciating culture-based humour requires familiarity with the relevant cultural context (Schmitz, 2002).

Linguistic humour is crafted through the use of language elements and the application of rhetorical techniques. These techniques are language-based and include the creative use of phonetic, morphological, and grammatical features. Common forms of linguistic humour include metaphors, hyperbole, puns, and other rhetorical devices, as well as stylistic rhetoric. Rhetoric plays a crucial role in linguistic humour, helping to convey comedic effects to the target audience (Schmitz, 2002).

In order to analyse the translation procedures used to translate the humorous language in The Big Bang Theory, translation procedures as proposed by Newmark (1988) are used as a framework. Newmark (1988) proposed 17 translation procedures.

(i) Transference is a translation procedure that borrows a word or term from the source language along with its meaning and transfers it into the target language (Newmark, 1988). Typically, borrowed words or terms retain their original spelling (Husin, 2016). The translation procedure of transference differs from (ii) naturalization. Naturalization is a translation procedure that borrows a word or term from the source language and adapts it to the phonological and orthographic systems of the target language (Newmark, 1988).

Cultural terms or expressions in the source language can be translated using their cultural equivalents in the target language through (iii) cultural equivalence. If the cultural element in the source text has no equivalent in the target language, it can be translated with an explanation that describes the cultural element through (iv) descriptive equivalence. Cultural elements can also be translated using non-cultural equivalents through (v) functional equivalence, which explains the function of the cultural element (Newmark, 1988). (vi) Synonymy is used when a word or expression in the source language has no precise equivalent in the target language (Newmark, 1988). In such cases, a synonym is used (Husin, 2016).

Newmark (1988) also introduced (vii) through translation as a translation procedure. Names of organisations, historical terms, and administrative terms can be translated using the through-translation procedure (Newmark, 1988). This procedure is used only if the equivalent term is already in use in the target language (Husin, 2016).

(viii) Shift or transposition is a translation procedure that changes the grammatical class of a word or element in the source language to a different grammatical class in the target language (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995; Newmark, 1988). The equivalents used carry the same meaning, and the changes made do not alter the overall meaning of the text. Only the grammatical class or type of the word changes, not its meaning (Husin, 2016). Transposition can also modify the usual structure used by translators (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995).

The mindset and background of source language readers and target language readers often differ. These differences can result in varying perceptions and understandings (Husin, 2016). (ix) Modulation can be used to translate source texts. This translation procedure alters the perception of the target readers while maintaining the original message and meaning of the source text (Newmark, 1988; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). Modulation ensures that the resulting translation is easily understood by the target readers.

Specific terms referring to institutional names can be translated using (x) recognised translation. This procedure employs equivalents that are already established and accepted in the target language (Newmark, 1988). (xi) Label translation is a procedure that typically uses quotation marks because the translation is temporary. This procedure is usually applied to translate newly coined terms. Over time, as the words and terms translated using this procedure gain general acceptance, quotation marks are no longer used (Newmark, 1988).

According to Newmark (1988), the pragmatic effect, metaphor, and actual meaning of sentences in the source text can be replaced with other words, phrases, or sentences in the target language. This can be achieved through the translation procedure of (xii) compensation with the same effect. A lexical item in the source language can also be translated through (xiii) componential analysis with words that have nearly the same meaning in the target language. However, these equivalents are not one-to-one matches (Husin, 2016).

Newmark (1988) also introduced reduction and expansion as translation procedures. These procedures should

be used sparingly as they can reduce or add to the message of the source text (Newmark, 1988). To avoid confusion for the target readers, (xv) paraphrasing is also used as a translation procedure.

(xvi) Couplets or combinations of more than one translation procedure can be employed to translate words in the source text (Newmark, 1988). Translators may also use (xvii) notes and glossaries to explain cultural or technical terms that are distinct in the target language culture. Notes are typically included in the translation as part of the text, while glossaries are placed at the end of the translated text (Newmark, 1988).

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study aims to analyse the translation procedures used in translating humorous language found in an American sitcom, The Big Bang Theory. Data collected for this study was used to achieve the research objectives, (i) to identify the humour language in the Big Bang Theory sitcom, and (ii) to analyse the translation procedures used to translate the humorous languages. Two research methods are used to achieve these two objectives, (i) content analysis and (ii) comparative analysis.

Content analysis is used to identify the humorous language in The Big Bang Theory. The data collected categorised into types of humour based on the classification by Schmitz (2002). The humorous languages identified were compared to their equivalents in the target language through comparative analysis to analyse translation procedures used in translating humorous language in The Big Bang Theory sitcom.

The Big Bang Theory sitcom is used as the corpus of this study. The series of this sitcom was downloaded from Youku. There are 12 seasons of The Big Bang Theory aired in China. 12 episodes of The Big Bang Theory are used for the study are:

1.   Season One Episode 17 (S1E17)

2.   Season Two Episode 1 (S2E1)

3.   Season Three Episode 23 (S3E23)

4.   Season Four Episode 1 (S4E1)

5.   Season Five Episode 24 (S5E24)

6.   Season Six Episode 1 (S6E1)

7.   Season Seven Episode 24 (S7E24)

8.   Season Eight Episode 1 (S8E1)

9.   Season Nine Episode 24 (S9E24)

10. Season Ten Episode 1 (S10E1)

11. Season Eleven Episode 24 (S11E24)

12. Season Twelve Episode 1 (S12E1)

Humorous languages are identified by watching all these episodes. To ensure accuracy, all the humorous languages identified are then reviewed and validated by a second rater assigned.

The Big Bang Theory

The Big Bang Theory is one of the popular American sitcoms in China (Liu & Jiang, 2022). Its popularity has gained a lot of attention from many parties including academic researchers. There are studies on this sitcom that have been carried out in China.

The Big Bang Theory is a comedic sitcom that follows the lives of four socially awkward yet brilliant scientists;

physicist Leonard Hofstadter, theoretical physicist Sheldon Cooper, aerospace engineer Howard Wolowitz, and astrophysicist Rajesh Koothrappali and their interactions with the world outside their academic bubble.

The series begins when Leonard and Sheldon, roommates, meet Penny. Penny is an aspiring actress and waitress, who moves into the apartment across the hall. Penny's street smarts and social charm provide a humorous contrast to the nerdy and often socially inept personalities of the four men.

The show explores their everyday adventures, romantic relationships, and quirky dynamics, such as Sheldon's rigid adherence to rules, Howard's flamboyant personality, and Raj's initial inability to talk to women unless he's drunk. Over time, the characters grow personally and professionally, navigating friendships, marriages, and careers.

The sitcom, renowned for its witty dialogue and clever use of science-related humour, became a cultural phenomenon, blending geek culture with heartwarming stories of love, friendship, and personal growth.

The Big Bang Theory has garnered significant popularity, with 28,000 fans, 1.06 billion views, and 8,634 posts on Weibo, a prominent Chinese social media platform. On Baidu Tieba, the "Big Bang Theory Fan Group" boasts 226,000 posts, further highlighting the show's appeal and active discussions. Similarly, the "American Drama Fan Group" on Baidu Tieba has amassed an impressive 13.05 million posts, underscoring the immense popularity of American TV series among Chinese youth. The writer attributes this widespread appeal to five key factors (Liu & Jiang, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the analysis of the American sitcom The Big Bang Theory found that 149 items can be classified as humorous language. All these items identified can be divided into three types. Table 1 shows the frequency of these items based on their types.

Table 1: Types of Humorous Language in the Big Bang Theory

Episodes	Universal Humour	Cultural-based Himour	Linguistic Humour
S1E17	13	2	2
S2E1	11	0	2
S1E23	15	0	1
S4E1	14	1	1
S5E24	14	0	3
S6E1	15	0	0
S7E24	14	0	0
S8E1	13	0	0
S9E24	9	1	0
S10E1	10	0	1
S11E24	6	0	0
S12E1	11	0	0
Total	145 (91.19%)	4 (2.52%)	10 (6.29%)
	159 (100%)		

Based on the content analysis done, it is found that there are 159 items which are identified as humorous language. All this data is verified by a second rater. All these items can be classified into three types based on

Schmitz's (2002) classifications.

Table 1 shows the distribution of three types of humour; universal humour, cultural-based humour, and linguistic humour across episodes from different seasons. Universal humour dominates with a total of 145 occurrences (91.19%) across 159 episodes, appearing consistently in every season. Certain episodes, such as Season Three, Episode 23, and Season Six, Episode 1, feature as many as 15 instances of universal humour. This trend suggests a strong emphasis on creating content that is broadly relatable and accessible to a diverse audience.

In contrast, cultural-based humour is relatively rare, with only 4 occurrences (2.52%) throughout all the analysed episodes. It is absent in most episodes, appearing only occasionally, such as in Season Four, Episode 1, and Season Nine, Episode 24. This scarcity may indicate a deliberate effort to minimise cultural barriers and cater to a global audience.

Linguistic humour, with a total of 10 occurrences (6.29%), is slightly more prominent than cultural-based humours but remains inconsistent. It is used sporadically, with some episodes, such as Season Five, and Episode 24, featuring as many as 3 instances. However, there are several seasons and episodes without any linguistic humour, indicating that it is not a primary strategy for delivering comedy.

Overall, the data reflects a clear preference for universal humour, ensuring that the humour resonates widely across different audiences. Cultural-based and linguistic humour are used sparingly, which likely avoid alienating viewers who might not share specific cultural or linguistic contexts.

Example 1

Leonard: She was mad at him! She was done with him! Their relationship was broken beyond repair. And I walked over there, and I fixed it.

Howard: Boy, that story gets better every time you hear.

This conversation occurred in Episode 17 of Season 1. Penny had broken up with her ex-boyfriend. As Leonard fancied Penny, he went to console her. Nevertheless, after chatting with Penny, Penny reckoned that she ought to give her ex-boyfriend another chance. Leonard was surprised by this outcome. He had never anticipated that his attempt to console her would lead Penny to make up with her ex-boyfriend. So, he grumbled about it to Howard and said "She was mad at him! She was done with him! Their relationship was broken beyond repair. And I walked over there, and I fixed it". And Howard's response, "Boy, that story gets better every time you hear", had a teasing undertone.

Through this slightly sarcastic remark, he was humorously taking the mickey out of Leonard. This sort of humour is rather straightforward. One doesn't require special cultural background knowledge or a profound understanding of language skills to comprehend the joking sense within it, and thus it can be categorised as universal humour.

Example 2

Penny: Really? Your deeply religious born-again Christian mother wants a test-tube grand-baby born out of wedlock?

Sheldon: Curses.

Cultural-based humour demands knowledge of the relevant culture in order to understand the humour within it. This conversation occurred in Season 4, Episode 1. Sheldon planned to have a test-tube baby with Amy. Penny had tried numerous argumentative approaches to persuade Sheldon to abandon this idea, yet Sheldon hadn't been deterred by them. Eventually, Penny brought up Sheldon's deeply religious born-again Christian mother to make him give up the idea, and clearly, it proved to be an effective argument. Sheldon hadn't expected Penny to threaten him with his mother, and all he could say was "curses". Sheldon's flustered reaction made the audience laugh.

This dialogue involves religious culture, and only Christians or the audience who are familiar with the knowledge of Christianity can readily understand the humour behind that statement. This dialogue incorporates the cultural knowledge of Christianity. Based on the above analysis, it falls into the category of cultural-based humour.

Example 3

Raj: Incredible. You managed to screw up the screw-up.

This conversation took place in Episode 17 of Season 1. Penny was cross with her ex-boyfriend and stated that she was through with him and that their relationship was beyond mending. Penny's ex-boyfriend already had a new girlfriend, so when Penny went to see him, she discovered his new relationship and became absolutely furious. After she came back, she was really angry with Leonard and shouted at him. Then Raj said, "Incredible. You managed to cock up the cock-up."

The phrase "cock up" means to mess things up, and "the cock-up" means a messy situation. He was taking the mickey out of Leonard, who tends to make things even worse. According to the classification of humour mentioned above, it falls into the category of linguistic humour.

Table 2 shows the translation procedures used to translate humorous language depending on different types.

Table 2: Translation Procedures of Humorous Language

Types of humorous language	Lit	Tr	CE	RT	Para	Lbl	FE	NG
Universal Humour	91	1	8	3	39	1	2	0
Cultural-based Humour	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0
Linguistic Humour	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	2

Note:

Lit   Literal

Tr   Transference

CE   Cultural Equivalence

RT   Recognized Translation

Para   Paraphrase

Lbl   Label

FE   Functional Equivalence

NG   Notes and Glosses

According to Table 2, the distribution of translation procedures across different types of humorous language in The Big Bang Theory reveals distinct patterns in how various humour types are handled. For universal humour, the most common translation method is literal translation, used in 91 instances, followed by paraphrasing in 39 cases.

Other procedures, such as cultural equivalence, recognized translation, and label, occur less frequently, with eight (8), three (3) and one (1) instance, respectively. Transference is used only once for universal humour, highlighting the need for more context-based adaptations rather than direct borrowing. In cultural-based humour, paraphrasing and cultural equivalence are most commonly used, while transference and recognized translation

are minimal.

Linguistic humour predominantly relies on paraphrasing, with eight (8) instances, and utilizes notes and gloss in two (2) cases to clarify the humour based on wordplay or homophones. This distribution demonstrates the nuanced strategies employed to retain the humour's impact across different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Literal is a direct procedure of translation. Translators will try to translate according to the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the original text as much as possible, attempting to maintain a high degree of consistency in both the form and content of the original text. Literal can be seen in Example 4.

Example 4 Source language (Season 1, Episode 17）

Leonard: Hi.

Sheldon: Mei du lui zi

Howard: You just called Leonard a syphilitic donkey.

Sheldon: My apologies, I'm only as good as my teacher

Target language:

莱纳德：   嗨~

谢尔顿：   梅毒驴子。

霍华德：   你刚才叫伦纳德是个得了梅毒的驴子。

谢尔顿：   向你道歉，我的水平只是和老师一样好。

"Mei du lui zi" is literally translated as "梅毒驴子 (Syphilitic donkey)." Here, the content in pinyin form is directly translated into corresponding Chinese words according to the literal meaning. This is a special form of literal translation, being faithful to the form and content of the original text.

"You just called Leonard a syphilitic donkey." is literally translated as "你刚才叫伦纳德是个得了梅毒的驴子 (You just called Leonard a syphilitic donkey)." Here, "called...a...", "syphilitic", "donkey" and so on are all translated according to the basic meanings of the words, completely conveying the information and structure of the original text.

"*My apologies, I'm only as good as my teacher." In the source text is literally translated a*s "向你道歉，我的 水平只是和老师一样好 (My apologies. I'm only as good as my teacher)." "My apologies", "as good as" and so on are all translated literally, accurately presenting the semantics and sentence structure of the original text.

To a large extent, this translation relies on literal translation, striving to be consistent with the original text in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure to accurately convey the content and information of the original text.

Paraphrase is a method of paraphrasing or free translation. It refers to restating the meaning of a sentence, paragraph or text using different words and sentence structures while keeping the core meaning of the original intact. Example 5 shows the use of paraphrasing in translating humorous language.

Example 5: Source language (Season 2, Episode 1）

Sheldon: OH, hi, Penny. FYI, the hot water is inadequate on machine two, so colors only, and four is still releasing the fabric softener too early in the cycle, so I'd avoid using that for your delicate.

谢尔顿：　　　你好啊，佩妮。顺便说句　2号机器的热水不足，别深色浅色混着洗，4号机器呢，洗衣程序中还是会提前放出织物柔顺剂，所以你那些精致的衣服，还是别用那台了。

In this example, the translation of "FYI" is rendered as "顺便说句 (By the way)," which does not correspond literally to the meaning of "For Your Information." Instead, it is paraphrased to align with its common function in daily communication. Similarly, "Colors only" is not literally translated as "只洗彩色衣服 (Only wash colored clothes)" but as "别深色浅色混着洗 (Don't wash dark and light-colored clothes together)," making the translation more consistent with Chinese expression habits in the context of laundry.

The phrase "Releasing the fabric softener too early in the cycle" is not rigidly translated as "在循环中过早释放织物柔顺剂 (Releasing the fabric softener too early in the cycle)" but paraphrased as "洗涤程序中织物柔顺剂仍然过早释放 (The fabric softener is still released too early in the laundry program)," making it easier for the audience to understand.

Rather than translating word-for-word based on the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the original text, this approach emphasizes understanding the original meaning and re-expressing it in a manner consistent with the target language's expression habits. This method focuses on conveying the meaning, intention, and style of the original text, rather than strictly preserving its form.

Cultural equivalence refers to the process of finding expressions in the target language that match the cultural connotation, significance, and function of those in the source language. The goal is to provide readers of the target language with a cultural experience similar to that of the source language audience, thereby avoiding misunderstandings or loss of information due to cultural differences. The following example demonstrates cultural equivalence in translation.

Example 6: Source language (Season 1, Episode 17）

Howard:　　You know, I'm really glad you decided to learn Mandarin.

Sheldon:　　　Why?

Howard:　　Once you're fluent, you'll have a billion more people to annoy instead of me.

Target language:

霍华德：　　你知道，我真的很高兴你决定学习普通话。

谢尔顿：　　为什么？

霍华德：　　一旦你学得溜了,你就有十几亿的人去烦，我就解放了。

The original text mentions "Mandarin," a term with specific cultural connotations. In Chinese culture, it refers to Standard Chinese. The translation renders it directly as "普通话 (Mandarin)," achieving cultural equivalence. This approach enables Chinese audiences to accurately understand the language concept referred to in the original text without any misunderstandings or ambiguities arising from cultural differences. By ensuring the

accurate transmission of cultural information, this method allows the translated text's audience to retain the same cultural understanding as the readers of the original text.

Functional equivalence emphasises that the translated text should fulfil the same functions in the target language environment as the original text does in the source language environment. These functions include the information-transfer function, emotional-expression function, imperative function, social-interaction function, and others. The following example demonstrates functional equivalence in practice.

Example 7: Source language (Season 1, Episode 17)

Leonard:　Morning.

Penny：　　Hi. Want to do yoga with me?

Leonard:　Um, let me just have some coffee first, and then I'll have the strength to tell you how much I won't be doing that.

Target language:

莱纳德:　　早安。

佩妮:　　　想跟我一起做瑜伽吗？

莱纳德:　　让我先喝杯咖啡我才有力气告诉你我超级不想做瑜伽。

In this example, the translated text conveys the same communicative function as the original text. The sentence, "Let me just have some coffee first, and then I'll have the strength to tell you how much I won't be doing that," is translated into "让我先喝杯咖啡，我才有力气告诉你我超级不想做瑜伽 (Let me have a cup of coffee first. Then I'll have the energy to tell you how much I really don't want to do yoga)." The translation is not word-for-word. Instead, it captures the speaker's humorous tone in refusing to do yoga while adapting to Chinese expression habits, thereby achieving functional equivalence.

Label translation refers to creating a concise tag for specific words, phrases, concepts, or combinations of people to refer to them. This tag serves as a short and representative identifier, allowing for efficient reference to corresponding objects during text or conversation translation. It avoids the repetitive use of lengthy original expressions. The following example illustrates this concept.

Example 8: Source language (Season 1, Episode 17)

Penny:　Oh my God! Sheldon and Amy.

Howard: Or as we called them "Shamy"

Target language:

佩妮:　我的天哪，谢尔顿和艾米。

霍华德: 或者像我们一样叫他们"谢米"

In the conversation, "Shamy" is a tag-like name created by Howard to refer to the couple Sheldon and Amy. This newly created "label" serves as a concise and representative term to refer to the pair. It aligns with the concept of "Label," facilitating quick reference during communication. Instead of repeatedly saying "Sheldon

and Amy" in full, the label "Shamy" makes the expression more convenient and efficient.

For cultural-based humour, the preferred method is paraphrasing, which appears twice in the examples provided. Cultural equivalence and transference appear once each.

Transference refers to directly transferring certain linguistic features from the source language, such as vocabulary, grammatical structures, or cultural images, into the target language. This method is often used when there are no completely equivalent expressions in the target language or when it is important to preserve the cultural characteristics and style of the source language.

Example 9: Source language (Season 1, Episode 17）

Penny: Sheldon?

Sheldon: Ai ya! Xia si wo le

Target language:

佩妮：谢尔顿？

谢尔顿: 哎呀，吓死我了

The expression "Ai ya! Xia si wo le" is presented directly in pinyin form, resembling the process of transferring elements from the source language (in this case, Chinese in pinyin) into the translated text. This is then matched with the standard Chinese expression, demonstrating a partial application of the transference concept. Example 10 is an example of paraphrase in cultural-based humour.

Example 10: Source language (Season 4, Episode 1）

Penny: Really? Your deeply religious born-again Christian mother wants a test-tube grandbaby born out of wedlock?

Sheldon: Curses.

Target language:

佩妮: 真的？你那虔信基督再生的母亲会想要一个非婚生的试管婴儿当她的孙子？（基督教徒不接受试管婴儿）

谢尔顿：诅咒你。

In this example, the translation of the phrase "Your deeply religious born-again Christian mother" demonstrates an adaptation to align with Chinese expression habits. The literal translation of "born-again Christian" is "重生的基督徒 (reborn Christian)," but the translated version "虔信基督再生的母亲 (a mother who devoutly believes in the rebirth of Christ)" moves away from a strictly word-for-word approach. Instead, it captures the essence of Sheldon's mother's deep religious devotion.

For the phrase "wants a test-tube grandbaby born out of wedlock", the literal translation "想要一个非婚生的试管婴儿孙子 (wants a test-tube grandchild born out of wedlock)" includes the phrase "out of wedlock," which literally translates to "在婚姻之外 (outside marriage)." However, the final translation uses the concise and

culturally aligned expression "非婚生的 (illegitimate)," which better conforms to Chinese linguistic norms. This demonstrates how paraphrasing can be employed to create translations that are both accurate and culturally appropriate.

Cultural equivalence refers to achieving a balance between different cultures, enabling a concept, behaviour, or expression in one culture to have an equivalent representation in another. This ensures that people from different cultural backgrounds can understand its meaning within their own cultural contexts. Example 11 illustrates this translation procedure.

Example 11: Source language (Season 9, Episode 24）

Sheldon:　Mother, she's an atheist, not a vampire.

Mother:　Either way, let's stop and get some garlic?

Target language:

谢尔顿：　妈，她是无神论者，又不是吸血鬼

妈妈：　无论哪种身份，麻烦停下车我要买大蒜驱邪（吸血鬼怕大蒜）。

In Western culture, vampires are widely believed to fear garlic, with garlic symbolising a means of protection or restraint against them. In Chinese culture, there is no direct equivalent to the concept of vampires. However, the expression "驱邪 (ward off evil spirits)" serves a similar cultural function. This allows Chinese audiences to understand the act of buying garlic in the context of warding off supernatural threats, much like the Western idea of repelling vampires. This adaptation achieves equivalence in conveying the cultural connotations during translation.

For linguistic humour, paraphrasing is the most commonly employed method, appearing in eight instances. This is followed by notes and gloss, which appear twice. Below is an example of a paraphrase in the translation of linguistic humour.

Example 12: Source language (Season 1, Episode 17）

Raj: Incredible. You managed to screw up the screw-up.

Target language:

拉杰：难以置信，你能把搞砸的事情再搞砸一次。

In this translation, a more flexible approach is used, which aligns better with everyday expression habits, rather than relying on a literal translation. The sentence "你能把搞砸的事情再搞砸一次 (You managed to screw up the screw-up)" is not translated exactly as in the original text, but instead, the meaning is re-expressed in a way that better fits Chinese language conventions. The concept of "managed to" (meaning "successfully") is captured through "能……一次" (able to do something again), while the emphasis on the action of messing up again is effectively conveyed. This method of paraphrasing makes the translation smoother and easier for Chinese audiences to understand, reflecting their language habits and thought patterns.

Notes are used to provide additional explanations for content in the translated text that may be confusing for readers. Gloss is mainly used to clarify rare words, archaic terms, technical jargon, or words with multiple meanings in a specific context. Here is an example:

Example 13 Source language (Season 2, Episode 1）

Sheldon: It's a joke. It relies on the homonymic relationship between "tick," the bloodsucking arachnid, and "tic," the involuntary muscular contraction. I made it up myself.

Target language:

谢尔顿：这是笑话啊，同音词嘛 "tick"是指吸血寄生虫（壁虱） 而"tic"是无意识 的肌肉痉挛，我自己编的。

When translating "tick" and "tic", the translator not only provided the corresponding Chinese words but also explained the terms in context. For "tick", the explanation "吸血寄生虫（壁虱）a blood-sucking parasite (tick)" is given, and for "tic", it is explained as "无意识的肌肉痉挛 (an involuntary muscle spasm). This additional explanation helps the audience understand the meanings of the two homophones, as well as the homophonic relationship on which the joke relies.

This approach is akin to traditional annotations that explain unfamiliar or key concepts, allowing the audience to grasp the special language features of the text. However, instead of following the conventional format of footnotes or endnotes, these explanations are integrated directly into the translation. This method ensures that the audience can easily understand the crucial element of the joke, which is formed by the homophones in the text.

In the translation of humorous language in The Big Bang Theory, various translation procedures, including paraphrase, cultural equivalence, transference, label, notes and gloss, and functional equivalence, play pivotal roles in ensuring the humour and meaning are accurately conveyed across cultures and languages. Paraphrasing allows for flexibility, adapting the original text to fit the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language while maintaining the core meaning. Cultural equivalence bridges the gap between distinct cultural contexts, enabling the audience to relate to concepts that may not have direct equivalents in their own culture. Transference preserves unique cultural elements, such as terms or expressions, by introducing them in their original form or with slight adaptation, while functional equivalence focuses on maintaining the same communicative function in the target language.

Furthermore, specific translation procedures such as gloss and notes provide clarity on complex concepts, ensuring that humour based on wordplay, puns, and homophones is understood by the target audience. Through these procedures, the translation not only remains faithful to the original in terms of content and style but also ensures that the humour resonates with the cultural and linguistic expectations of the audience. Overall, the translator's approach to balancing linguistic accuracy with cultural relevance is key to delivering a translation that successfully carries over the humour and intent of the original text.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the translation of humorous language in The Big Bang Theory, revealing a predominant use of universal humour with much less frequent instances of culture-based humour and linguistic humour. The findings highlight a diverse range of translation procedures employed to convey the humour effectively. For universal humour, a combination of literal and free translation is most commonly used, allowing for a balance between preserving the original humour and adapting it to the Chinese context. The translation of humorous language in The Big Bang Theory uses various procedures, including paraphrase, cultural equivalence, transference, label, notes, gloss, and functional equivalence, to accurately convey humour across cultures. Paraphrasing adapts the text to target language norms while preserving core meaning, while cultural equivalence helps translate concepts without direct equivalents in the target culture. Transference keeps unique cultural elements intact, and functional equivalence maintains the original communicative function. Gloss and notes clarify complex concepts, ensuring humour based on wordplay and puns are understood.

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