



Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona

how i  
met your  
mother

# How funny is dubbing?

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*English to Spanish dubbing in the sitcom “How I Met  
Your Mother”*

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cómo conocí  
a vuestra  
madre

# How funny is dubbing?

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## INTERESTED AGENTS

This research is of interest for linguists, psychologists, sociologists, and on a broader scale, TV show producers and translators, for no other study has tackled the issue of linguistic humour in the presented manner. This work enlightens the importance of translation and how the linguistic approach can let a joke sink or keep it afloat, sailing the seas of translation and reaching port safely. It also highlights the relevance of humour and how it can be a very useful tool for diverse means, and in turn become a powerful way for specialists of many branches to ease their jobs (in studying, theorizing, in therapy, in teaching, in producing and translating, etc.).

As humour is not limited to any expertise, many who make use of humour daily or are multilingual may also find some personal understanding in this study.

## OBJECTIVE AND RELEVANCE

The aim of this study is to value the amount of linguistic humour loss in dubbing, referring to both the weight of verbal humour as well as the cultural humour reflected in the use of language. Humour and language are both two constructs which are part of everybody's daily life, to some extent. Whether we participate in humorous activities or not, humour is constantly happening. Language is a main factor in communication, and communication is constant.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHIC UPDATE**

Since Hypocrite's use of the term "humour" to describe personality, the evolution of use and definition of the term has evolved. Currently, the studies on humour go from its physiological components to its social functions, going through interpersonal differences and correlating it with constructs such as health, personality, life quality, etc. In the study of conversational humour the key relies on previous utterances, information beyond the conversation frame, cultural elements... This type of humour depends heavily on cooperation and sharing contextual framing, as well as the meaning of the spoken lexemes, and inside conversational humour we find jokes, puns, wordplays, etc.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The sample of this study was made out Spain resident volunteers to ensure same cultural environment and control the weight of culture on humour. The subjects have to be able to speak Spanish or English, therefore taking either the Spanish or the English questionnaire and test. The final sample consisted of 22 subjects for each language, selected randomly from the total after some filtering to ensure a random yet balanced sample.

### **Material**

#### *Stimuli*

The tested material were 8 short videos from the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*, in its original version (USA English) and in the translated version to Spanish (Spain's Spanish), chosen due to the show's popularity and its contemporaneity

and humour variety. The selected clips all contain the *laugh track*, understanding that this track indicates a humoristic intention for the scene. Then they were put in pairs and classified in four types of clips: use of “*punchlines*”, use of “*puns*”, use of “*wordplay*” and contextual humour.

### *Instruments*

#### *A) Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (Thorson & Powell, 1993)*

To assess humour in the participants we asked them to fill in this self-reported scale. The results of the MSHS give an overall score of sense of humour in its use and understanding. For the Spanish subjects we used its Spanish adaptation, the *Escala Multidimensional del Sentido del Humor* (Carbelo, 2006).

#### *B) Questionnaire*

Before watching the clips demographic data was collected: age, nationality, gender, proficiency in the language of visualization of the clips, and prior knowledge of the show as well as affection towards it. After watching each clip, they were asked to rank how funny they found it on a 1 (not funny) to 5 (very funny) Likert scale.

### **Procedure**

The questionnaire and the test were distributed online via Google Questionnaire, and the subjects answered it from home with an option-selecting procedure. The link was open and accessible for a month and two days (15/01/2017 – 17/02/2018), and it was distributed through online social networks.

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Carbelo, B. (2006) Estudio del Sentido del Humor: *Validación de un Instrumento para Medir el Sentido del Humor, Análisis del Cuestionario y su Relación con el Estrés*. Tesis. Universidad de Alcalá. España.  
Thorson, J.A., Powell, F.C. (1993). Development and validation of the multidimensional sense of humor scale. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 49,13-23.

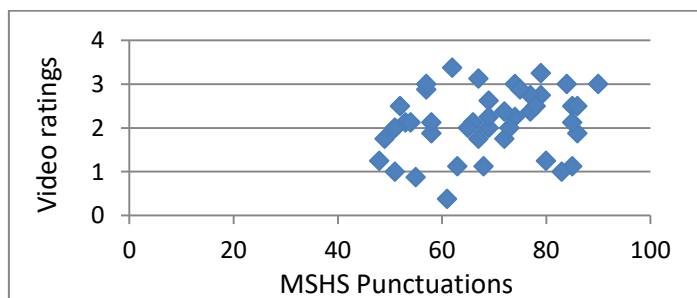
Certain instructions and guidelines were provided before doing the test, together with a presentation about the project and acknowledgements. Anonymity was assured and they were informed that the data would be used solely for this study. The total time needed was of around 15 minutes, informing the participants before-hand to avoid distractions and control external effects.

**RESULTS**

	Mean Videos	Mean Test		Mean Videos	Mean Test
ENGLISH SAMPLE (N=22)	<b>2,2557</b> (SD: 0,8269)	<b>69,5</b>	ENG 1 (≥69) n=11	<b>2,5</b>	<b>79,18</b>
			ENG 2 (<69) n=11	<b>2,011</b>	<b>59,82</b>
SPANISH SAMPLE (N=22)	<b>1,9762</b> (SD: 0,5748)	<b>67,5</b>	ESP 1 (≥69) n=11	<b>2,125</b>	<b>78,27</b>
			ESP 2 (<69) n=11	<b>1,875</b>	<b>56,73</b>

Table 1. Descriptive means and standard deviations for each sample and the subgroups.

Descriptively, regarding the hypothesis, the original-script videos are generally funnier, and people with higher test punctuations in the MSHS also gave higher video ratings. Using the non-parametrical correlation coefficient (Spearman), no correlation showed between the MSHS punctuations and the ratings ( $r=0,2441$ ).



Graph 1. Dispersion of the data shows the lack of correlation between the obtained test punctuations and the video ratings.

To analyse whether the apparent differences were significant to the hypothesis, various T tests were conducted. The difference in punctuation between the videos with linguistic elements (puns, punchlines and wordplay) and contextual humour videos was significant ( $p<0,03$ ).

To assess whether the intragroup rating differences were significant or not, it was tested (T test) in both sample's, and none showed a significant difference.

Looking at each video individually, between the samples only two videos show differences worth noting: one case of wordplay ( $p < 0,05$ ), and one case of a pun ( $p < 0,001$ ). When looking into them by pairs we also find significance in the wordplay videos ( $p < 0,005$ ). Comparing the total of linguistic videos between the groups, we obtain a significant result on linguistic jokes being punctuated higher in the English sample than in the Spanish ( $p < 0,005$ ), and that the clips which carry contextual humour do not show significant differences ( $p > 0,666$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

Using the MSHS we obtained the subjects punctuations regarding their levels of humour, expecting it to predict their clips ratings. However, this was tested and no correlation was shown, hence proving that the test results do not predict the humoristic experience of watching the non contextualized humoristic scenes.

Although the clips were chosen and paired in a way that there were two scenes containing the different types of linguistic humour (Puns, Wordplays and Punchlines), the two clips in each pair weren't rated equally; this means that if difference is shown, it is not due to the type of joke but to the joke itself.

The question, then, when translating is: what are we more interested in preserving? What piece of information do we want to keep faithful to the original?

To demonstrate that the linguistic elements are what cause the difference in the punctuations, the comparison between groups on the linguistic dependant humour (Puns, Wordplay and Punchlines) and the contextually dependant jokes

was analysed. When comparing the contextual humour clips there was no significant difference between groups. Yet there was a significant difference ( $p < 0,03$ ) when comparing the average group rating for the linguistic jokes.

All of the prior explained would support the main hypothesis that dubbing has an effect on humour rating, and that this difference highlights that the originally written humour is experienced as funnier than the dubbed one. Depending on the elaboration of the joke (the semantic depth), the linguistic adaptation (the translation), and the type of joke, the loss of linguistic humour can vary.

## **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

To conclude, we will point initially at how humour is a very personal experience and how, even if we group people regarding their use of humour, this does not mean their understanding of humour will also be equable. This also related to how the joke is translated; maybe some will find funnier that the meaning is preserved, while other might appreciate more that the wording is preserved.

Regarding this study and its limitations, point out that a longer time of experimenting and a bigger sample and stimuli selection would help reinforce some of the conclusions, or clear out those where the line was certainly blurry.

In future researches, this study might be relevant both for psychologists and linguists (and linguist psychologists), as it highlights how the individuals context, personal experience, appreciation of humour, and the linguistic elements of the translation are all important elements in humour. Understanding how humour works could turn it into a valuable tool, for it might find use in teaching and learning processes in studying people's mental representations, or even in their views and understandings of linguistics.