(Re)Creating the Power of Language: A Comparative Analysis on Pun Translation in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and Its Variants in Albanian

MSc. Eriola Qafzezi

"Fan S. Noli" University, Korça, Albania
E-mail: eriola_bonja@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to explore on the power of language to express implied meanings and to compare the original effect to the effect (re)created through translation. The focus of the present comparative analysis will be puns, all extracted from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and its variants in Albanian. These Albanian variants will be compared not only to the original, but also among themselves. The comparison will serve not only the aim of deciding what changes in the type and composition of the original puns versus their translations, but also the effect transmitted in each case, i.e. whether the humor or irony intended in the original is still felt in Albanian. The comparative analysis will highlight some ways of translating puns in the corpus selected. The paper will be completed by some conclusions referring to the corpus analyzed and overall to the translation of puns in general.

Keywords: *puns; translation; strategies; comparison*

1. Introduction

The power of language to express meaning, either directly or indirectly, has long been acknowledged. We all communicate through language, although sometimes more importance is attached to the unsaid rather than to the obviously uttered message. This fascinating feature of language is one of the most problematic areas for the translator and, at the same time, one of the most attractive areas of study for scholars and linguists. This paper focuses on pun translation from English language into Albanian language with the aim of highlighting not only the possible strategies used by several translators, but also reflecting on the effect the strategies used have on potential target readers, i.e. whether the original intention of the author is preserved in translation. Throughout the paper, we will be guided by the general notion that translation is a form of communication and as such it should primarily aim at understanding, but in order for it to be an effective and successful communication several factors should be taken into consideration, among which of foremost importance is the purpose of the source text and its components which should be (re)created for the target audience in order to fulfill the mission of a translator: building bridges through different languages, different cultures, different audiences.

2. Research questions

For the purposes of the present study we have chosen one the mostly representative books when we think about puns and the power of language to express and imply meanings: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by *Lewis Carroll.* Comparison of translated variants into Albanian among themselves and with the original will serve the purpose of answering the following questions (which cover the objectives of this paper as well):

1. What are some strategies used about pun translation observed in the Albanian variants?
2. Which is the most frequently used strategy in each variant?
3. Which is the most frequently used strategy in all corpus?
4. Is there any change observed in the use of the strategies diachronically?

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5. How does pun translation affect the overall understanding of the text and the process of communication?
6. What can translators who will approach pun translation in the future benefit from this study?
7. Does the translator translate puns, adapt puns, create puns or recreate puns in the target language?

3. Corpus selected and procedure of study

For the purposes of this paper we have selected five different Albanian variants of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* The first variant is the first translation of the original and it dates in 1944, whereas the last Albanian variant is more contemporary, published in 2008. The purposes of such a selection are multifold. First and foremost, we want to compare target texts not only to the source text, but also among themselves. This comparison presents special interest since translated variants cover a time span of more than sixty years and they were also published in different regimes, representing different periods of time, which also helps us reflect on the status of translation through the years. Secondly, such a wide-covering comparison helps us widen the focus of research as well, which in turn embraces a wide range of strategies used, thus rendering the present study more encompassing, while, at the same time, offering useful strategies on pun translation to translators in general. Furthermore, through comparison of variants we have noticed the power of the translator to attract specific readers, depending on the strategies used in translation of puns. Last, but not the least, comparison of translated variants helps us reflect once more about the power of language and the different ways to (re)construct that power through translation.

Throughout this paper we are going to refer to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as the Source Text (abbreviated as ST) and the variants translated into Albanian as Target Texts (TT/TTs). As mentioned above, there are five variants in Albanian published in different years and by different translators as presented below:

1) Variant I – translation into Albanian by *Hysejn Çela dhe Beqir Çela* (viti 1944),
2) Variant II – translation into Albanian by *Maqo Afezolli* (1961),
3) Variant III – translation into Albanian by *Maqo Afezolli* (1998),
4) Variant IV – translation into Albanian by *Taulant dhe Eri Tafa* (2008),
5) Variant V – translation into Albanian by *Frederik Shuraja* (2008).

To fulfill the aims of this study, we have first identified puns and their types and subtypes in the original English ST. Having completed the process of pun identification, we have scrutinized each of the Albanian TTs and identified those parts of the texts which correspond to original puns already identified in the first place. Careful comparison and observation of all examples have guided us towards explicitation of the strategies observed in translation of the puns. Examples found to exhibit the same strategy have been grouped together as evidence of the same translation tendency. Having categorized the possible strategies used by translators in the entire selected corpus (along with the respective representative examples) we have displayed the results of our findings through various tables and charts, which will help us reflect on the strategies used, their effectiveness, the diachronically observed changes in strategies used, etc. The paper is completed by some conclusions referring to the corpus analyzed and recommendations about the translation of puns in general.

4. Theoretical background on pun translation

Throughout *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* the language used by the author is an infinite source of wordplays and allusions which amuse the reader but, at the same time, present difficulties to the translator. In this part of our study we are going to theoretically outline some definitions of puns and strategies about their translation briefly.

Dirk Delabastita, one of the leading scholars who has done extensive research on puns and their translation declares "Wordplay is the general name for the various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant

confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings".[1] Several scholars (among them Delabastita, Alexieva, Weissbord) use the terms 'wordplay' and 'pun' interchangeably[2], however, since distinguishing between wordplays and puns is not the focus of our study, we will assume that puns are included in the given definition of wordplay.

Formally, the definition given by Delabastita includes homonymy (same sound and writing), homophony (same sound), homography (same writing) and paronymy (similar form). Similarly, Alexieva stresses that "punning is possible in any language insofar as it seems to be a universal feature of language to have words with more than one meaning (polysemy), different words with the same spelling or pronunciation (homographs and homophones) and words which are synonyms or near-synonyms while having different pragmatic meanings and evoking different associations".[3] So, we can decide that there may be several forms of puns such as homonymy, homophony, homograph, paronymy, polysemy, malapropism, simile, name-giving, etc.

The pun can never be interpreted isolated from the text and the perceptions of the reader. The context and the reader are two factors of immense importance in the process of pun identification and interpretation. As Delabastita states: 'A necessary condition for pun perception is a context in which multiple and disparate meanings for the pun word are acceptable; the context must concern itself with certain matters if a pun is to be made on a certain word'.[4]

The most frequently raised question with reference to puns is: Can puns be translated after all? The answer to this question depends on notions of equivalence and identity. In fact, we agree with Ristani who concludes that equivalence in translation should never be thought to involve attempts to accomplish reproduction and recreation of an identical text, which is impossible even within the same language.[5] Based on the fact that one hundred per cent equivalence is not an aim that can be reached (or, for that matter, even sought) in translation practice, scholars have outlined several ways of 'translating' puns involving several techniques: pun-to-pun translation, changing the type of pun, replacing a pun with a non-pun, replacing a pun with a rhetorically related device such as repetition, alliteration or rhyme, altering the effect of a pun, passing from comical pun to comical non-pun, situational pun, literal meaning, footnotes, compensation, manipulative translation, non-translation, pun-to-zero, etc.[6]

On the other hand, translation can also be thought of as a decision-making process.[7] Translators will always have to make decisions weighing 'loss' against 'gain' and pondering the pros and cons of some 'sacrifice' or other.[8] Thus, the choice of one strategy over the other will continuously have certain implications on general understanding of the text and effect transmitted to target readers, which in turn depend on the effectiveness of the strategy used and creativity of the translator. As Weissbrod states there are always subjective features relevant, including the translator's talent, proficiency, and willingness to spend time finding solutions in the face of hard-to-translate wordplays.[9]

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1 Delabastita (1996:128)
2 Delabastita (1996:128) , Alexieva (1997: 138), Weisbord (1996: 224)
3 Alexieva (1997: 138)
4 Delabastita (1993:70)
5 Ristani (2010: 106)
6 Delabastita (1996: 134) Gottlieb (1997: 210), von Flotow (1997: 51), Lefevere (1992: 52, 55)
7 From the point of view of the working situation of the translator at any moment of his work (that is from the pragmatic point of view), translating is a DECISION PROCESS: a series of a certain number of consecutive situations—moves, as in a game—situations imposing on the translator the necessity of choosing among a certain (and very often exactly definable) number of alternatives. (Levý, 2000: 148)
8 Delabastita (1997:11)
9 Weissbrod (1996: 221)

5. Findings of the comparative study on pun translation from English into Albanian

In order to fulfill the aims of this paper, we have selected a total of 29 puns which include several types and subtypes of puns such as malapropisms, paronymous words, homonyms, polysemantic words, homophones, homographs, idioms, etc. Before entering into analysis of the strategies used in translation, it is necessary to mention the fact that each reading and rereading of the original is a fascinatingly enriching experience which never ceases to surprise us with regard to the power of language to express meaning, nonsense and implications. Therefore we acknowledge the fact that the number of puns selected for the purposes of this study is by no means exclusive since each careful reading will explicate ever more implicit puns. Having said that, our attention is focused only on those selected examples and their translations into Albanian. Having carefully compared the puns in the original ST and their translations in the five variants in Albanian language, we have highlighted several strategies which will be presented below. Each strategy will be illustrated by examples. A comprehensive analysis of all strategies, accompanied by their representation through charts, will be helpful in drawing conclusions and recommendations for this study, given by the end of this paper.

Strategy # 1 – Reproducing ST puns in the TT

Careful observation and comparison of English ST with the Albanian variants has brought to light several examples in which puns of the original have been successfully reproduced in Albanian by the translators. This is possibly due to the fact that puns of the original belong to different types or subtypes and in their translation sometimes the type or subtype may change, but the important thing (to translators, readers, and, of course, to the comparison comprised in this study) is that the humor or irony intended in the original can still be felt in Albanian through the combination of words chosen by the translators, which constitute again a pun in the Albanian TT.

Example 1

| *'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said Alice, 'a great girl like you,' (she might well say this), 'to go on crying in this way!* (p 14) | "Duhet të keshë turp nga vehtja!" tha Liza: "Nji ***vajz' e madhe*** si ti..." (këtê tashti mund t'a thoshte me të drejtë) " me qà kështu! (V. I, p. 20) |

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: You should be ashamed of yourself!" said Alice: "**A big girl** like you.." (She could rightly say so now) "to cry in this way!"]

The pun can still be felt in Albanian language, where the adjective 'e madhe' ('big') can refer both to bodily dimensions as well as to age.

Example 2

| *'That's the reason they're called **lessons**,' the Gryphon remarked: 'because they **lessen** from day to day.'* (p. 42) | Prandaj quhej ***shkollë*!**" theksoi Grifoni. "Në fakt nëse ti zëvendëson një ***"a" me "o", në vend të shkollës bëhet shkallë. Dhe prandaj çdo ditë shkallëzohet dhe hiqet një orë"***. (v. IV, p. 123) |

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: That is the reason it is called '**school'** remarked the Gryphon. 'In fact, if you substitute some letters you get the word '**scale'**. **So each day descends on the scale and has one less hour.**']

In this example the translator has recreated a pun in Albanian, in both the ST and the TT, the pun is based on paronymy. Although the word is changed from lessons to school, this is completely justified since we

can laugh at what the Gryphon says and his attitude towards lessons or school, expressed humorously in both English and Albanian respectively.

Strategy # 2 – Translating the ST pun components without reproducing a pun in TT

This strategy comprises all those cases in which the pun in the ST is translated linguistically word for word, thereby losing all intended effect (humor or irony or ambiguity), transmitting loosely the superficial meaning and ignoring the implications altogether.

Example 1

| *...and the **fall** was over.* (p. 12) | Domethënë se ***zbritja*** kishte marrë fund. (v. III, p. 14) |

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: 'This meant that the **going down** was over.']
In the original fall refers both to the action of descending and to autumn - the season. In the Albanian TT, however, we can only find reference to the action of descending, resulting in the loss of the original pun.

Example 2

| *This is the **driest** thing I know.* (p. 17) | ... do ta gjej unë mënyrën si të ***thaheni***!" (v.IV, p. 30) |

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: I will find a way to **drain away all water**.]
In the TT in Albanian it is transmitted only one meaning of the adjective dry – not wet, whereas the other implied meaning – boring, uninteresting, monotonous and unexciting – is not transferred at all. It is important to reveal that the monotonous implication refers to the summary of British history described by the Mouse, something which does not arouse any kind of interest in the other characters listening to him.

Strategy # 3 – Omission of the ST pun in the TT

This strategy involves translating puns through omission, that is to say, not translating them at all. It represents all those cases we have found in which there is traced no corresponding TT translation for the existing pun in ST.

Example 1

| *'I had **NOT**!' cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.*
*'A **knot**!' said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her. 'Oh, do let me help to undo it!'*
"I shall do nothing of the sort," said the Mouse.
"You insult me by talking such nonsense!" (p. 19) | ---
Ti më fyen vazhdimisht me ato marrëzi që flet!
(v. III, p. 37) |

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: --------You constantly insut me by talking such nonsense!']
The translator has omitted that part of the text which contains the homophonic pun not-knot by transmitting for the Albanian readers just the message behind it – difficulty in establishing communication among characters due to lack of understanding.

*…there's a large mustard-**mine** near here. And the moral of that is—'The more there is of **mine**, the less there is of yours.'* (p. 39)	-- (V.I, p.98)

As it can be noticed, the two sentences which contain the homonymic pun *mine-mine* have not been translated at all.

Strategy # 4 - Transferring the ST pun in the TT

Through the comparative analysis that we have undertaken, we have monitored cases in which words or expressions that constitute a pun in ST are translated by being 'transferred' in the TT through editorial techniques such as footnotes or explanations within brackets added by the translator. He decides to transfer the puns in their original form and composition as they appear in the ST, even though they are not normally used in this way in Albanian.

Example 1

*'That's the reason they're called **lessons**,' the Gryphon remarked: 'because they **lessen** from day to day.'* (p. 42)	"Prandaj quhen '***mêhsime*'ato**" – tha Grifoni – "se shkojnë gjithënjë **duke u mehur**"*! (***shën. përkth. duke u pakësuar**) (v. II, p. 109)

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: That is why they are called "**lessons**" – said the Gryphon – "because they are constantly "**lessening**"*! (***translator's note: lessening - dimnishing**]
The pun is transferred in TT; additionally, the translator includes a note which provides further explanation which makes the pun even more explicit.

Example 2

'Did you say pig, or fig?' said the Cat. (p. 32)	- A the ***derr***, apo ***fik***-*? – e pyeti ajo vajzën. (*shën. përkth. Anglisht pig (derr) dhe fig (fik) janë fjalë që ngatërrohen lehtë me njëra-tjetrën) (v. III, p. 75)

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: Did you say pig or fig*? – she asked the girl. (*translator's note: In English language 'pig' and 'fig' are easily confused words.]
We agree with Tupja who says that translator's notes are inevitable, especially when there are puns or historical allusions which should be explained so as to allow the target reader to understand and taste them thoroughly[10]. These notes let readers identify a part of text which originally contained a pun, which has not been recreated in the TT by the translator, who chooses to guide target readers towards original pun of the ST, especially when he follows strictly the words of the original pun. However, the effectiveness of such a technique is debatable because it calls for an adult audience rather than children.

6. Results and Discussion

Based on the comparative analysis and the strategies described above, let us represent data graphically through tables and charts for better understanding.

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[10] *Edmond Tupja (2003) Pro Translatore, p. 81.*

Table 1 Distribution of pun translation strategies in five Albanian variants

Strategy / Variant		Reproducing ST puns in the TT		Translating the ST pun components without reproducing a pun in TT		Omission of the ST pun in the TT		Transferring the ST pun in the TT	
		Number of puns	%	Number of puns	%	Number of puns	%	Number of puns	%
I	*Hysejn Çela Beqir Çela (1944)*	14	**48%**	12	**42%**	1	**3%**	2	**7%**
II	*Maqo Afezolli (1961)*	10	**35%**	14	**48%**	0	**0%**	5	**17%**
III	*Maqo Afezolli (1998)*	9	**31%**	15	**52%**	1	**3%**	4	**14%**
IV	*Taulant and Eri Tafa (2008)*	7	**24%**	16	**55%**	0	**0%**	6	**21%**
V	*Frederik Shuraja (2008)*	9	**31%**	18	**63%**	1	**3%**	1	**3%**
Total		49	**34%**	75	**52%**	3	**2%**	18	**12%**

The table shows how each strategy is used in the corpus under analysis. Comparing the five variants, we may see that it is the translator of the first variant who has reproduced the highest number of ST puns (48%), followed by the translator of the second variant (35%). The second strategy – translating the ST pun components without reproducing a pun in TT – is the most extensively used in all the corpus, undergoing significant rise from the first variant (42%) to the last (63%). This strategy is also the most frequent used by all translators (52%), so more than half of ST puns are lost in translation. In few cases (2% in all corpus) the part of the text containing a pun is not translated at all. It has to be mentioned, however, that in a significant number of cases (34%) puns have been recreated in translation (the first strategy) and also some of them have been transferred through different techniques (12%).

These data can also be represented through the following charts in order to distinguish better among variants and strategies used in each of them.
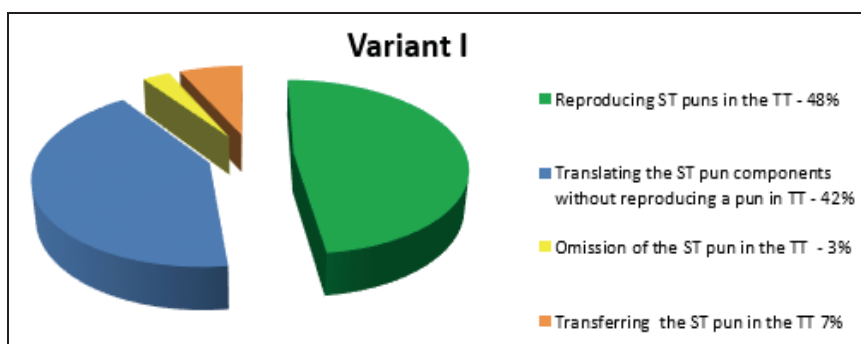
Chart 1 Strategies used in Variant I
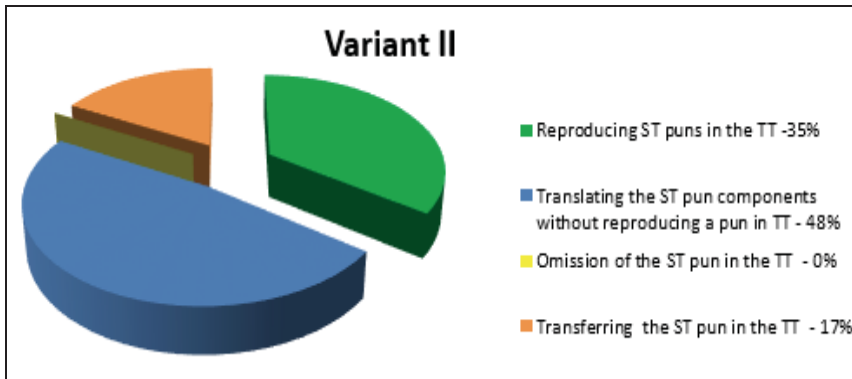
Chart 2 Strategies used in Variant II

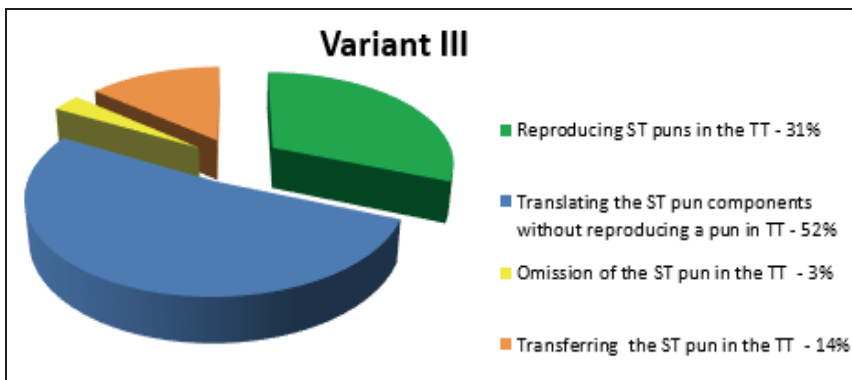**Chart 3** Strategies used in Variant III

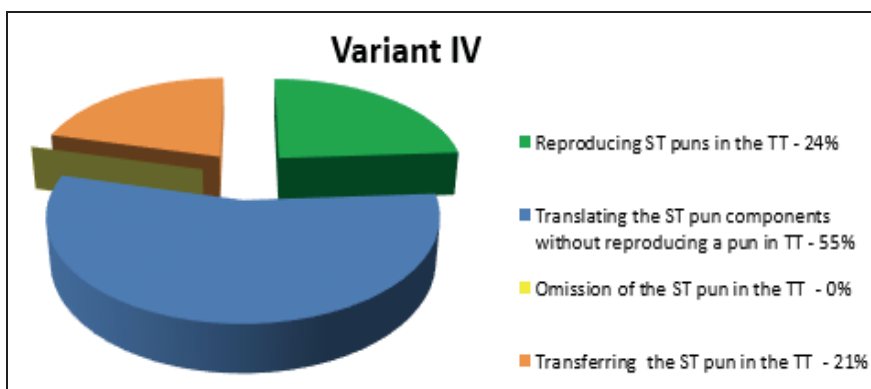

Chart 4 Strategies used in Variant IV

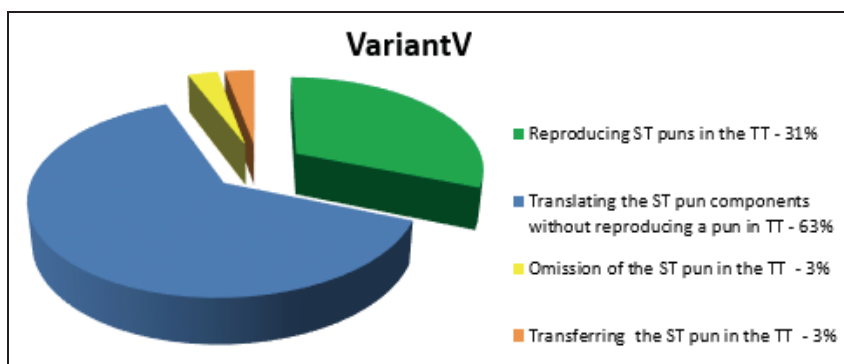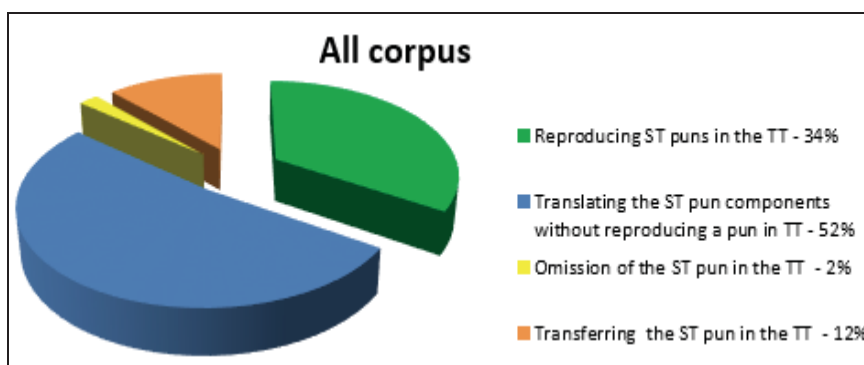**Chart 5** Strategies used in Variant V

Chart 6 Comparison of strategies used in all corpus

We think that in selecting words or expressions to use in the TT translators should be guided by faithfulness not only to the source text and author, but also faithfulness towards TT readers. This does not mean that every pun can or should be recreated through translation. The principle that should guide the translator is trying to achieve *approximately the same effect* as in the original, although sometimes this might mean change in the type and structure of the pun or additional explanations or notes. From this viewpoint, we would like to mention an interesting tendency observed during comparison of each of the translated variants in Albanian to the English ST. There are some cases in which we have traced a pun in Albanian for which there is no corresponding pun in English. This presents a wise strategy on the behalf of the translator, who, after being aware of the distinct characteristic of the way language is used by the author in English, tries to empathize with him and find a way to compensate for all those cases in which the pun has not been recreated. We would categorize this as another strategy called ***Compensating for loss of ST puns by introducing new puns in the ST.*** You can see the two examples below as illustration of this strategy.[11]

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11 *The examples found to be representative of this strategy are just a few, that is the reason why we have not included it in the presentation of tables and charts. It must be pointed out, however, that this strategy is really important and requires understanding of the style and intentions of the author throughout the entire work in order to compensate effectively for loss of previous puns.*

Example 1

| *Maybe it's always pepper that makes people hot-tempered,… and vinegar that makes them sour--and **chamomile that makes them bitter**--and--and barley-sugar and such things that make children sweet-tempered.* (p. 39) | Ndoshta është piperi që i bën njerëzit zemërakë e gjaknxehtë! ... dhe uthulla që i bën të thartë ... **hithra të hidhur** ... çokollatat që i bëjnë fëmijët të ëmbël... " (V.II, p. 39) | Ndoshta pikërisht prej piperit njerëzit nxehen shpesh, nga uthulla thartohen, nga ilaçet e **hidhura hidhërohen**, ndërsa...ndërsa nga **ëmbëlsirat** fëmijët bëhen **karamele**! (V.V, p.105) |

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: (V.II) Maybe it is pepper which makes people irritable and quick-tempered! ...and vinegar that makes them sour, **nettle that makes them naggle,** ... and chocolates make them sweet ...– (V.V) Maybe it is pepper itself that makes people so hot-tempered, vinegar that makes them sour, **bitter pills make them be ill-bitter,** ...while...while **sweets** make them **sweet**]

There is no pun in the original ST, but, surprisingly, there are puns in two Albanian TTs. The translator of the second variant has changed the type of the original pun, creating anew a pun based on paronymy.

Example 2

| *'Now I growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad.'*
*'I call it **purring**, not **growling**,' said Alice.*
'Call it what you like,' said the Cat. (p.31) | "Unë ... gërindem kur jam e kënaqun e luej bishtin kur zemrohem. Prandej unë jam e marrë!"<br>"Unë e quej **gërhatje** atê t'anden e jo **gërindje**", tha Liza.
"Queje si të duesh!" ia priti Macja, dhe u-zhduk. (V. I, p. 70) |

[Back-Translation from Albanian TT: 'I...**growl** when I'm happy and wag my tail when I'm angry. That is why I'm mad!'- 'I would not call it **growling** but **grunting**, said Alice. - 'Call it what you like!' replied the Cat disappearing'.]

The two corresponding Albanian words chosen by the translator for **purring** and **growling** (resp. **gërhatje** dhe **gërindje**) create an interesting pun based on paronymy, accompanied by humorous effect on the target readers.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

❖ On the basis of the present study, we can say that there are four different strategies of translating puns: *Reproducing ST puns in TT, Translating ST pun components without reproducing a pun in TT, Omission of ST puns in TT* and *Transferring ST puns in TT.*

❖ The prevailing strategy used is *translating ST pun components without reproducing a pun in TT.* Also, it can be observed that the percentage of this strategy has been rising from the first variant (42%) up to the last (63%), whereas the percentage of the strategy of *reproducing ST pun in the TT* has been declining through the years. However, recreated puns appear in more than one third of the entire corpus (34%) which shows that authors have paid attention to the ST and its specificity – intentionally implicit language transmitting humor or irony. Following this logic, there are few cases in which puns are omitted (2%), whereas there are significant cases in which puns have been transferred and explained through footnotes or explanations in brackets (12%).

❖ The fact that puns *are* translated devaluates the notion of pun untranslatability, since the corpus under observation serves as the best living evidence. However, pun translation involves always difficulties related to cultural background, reader's age and experience, and, of course, translator's knowledge and willingness to search constantly (sometimes even ceaselessly) for the right word(s). It is highly important for the translator to be closely absorbed in the process of careful reading and understanding of the ST, accompanied by relentless consultation of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, phraseological dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. in order to find the meaning expressed

(explicitly or implicitly) in ST and transmit it to TT readers. This is, after all, the mission of the translator. Based on results of our study, we can state that it *is* possible to translate puns, despite the difficulties that this would entail.

❖ We recommend to translators that the best thing to be done in translation of puns is identification of the original intention of the author and transmission of that intention, by trying to produce approximately the same effect felt by ST readers.

8. Implication of the study for future research

This study aims at representing some observed strategies of pun translation. Comparison of the several TTs has helped us pinpoint different strategies. This study can be further extended in the future by involving other decisive factors in pun translation, such as the importance of text receivers (target readers versus source readers), presenting ways to measure the effectiveness of each strategy, applying other strategies to translate puns from English into Albanian or vice versa, the influence of culture in the choice of one strategy over another during translation, observing the inclination of each Albanian variant towards foreignizing or domesticating, etc.

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