



Provided by the author(s) and University of Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

Title	Harry Potter is funny. The tricky task of translating humour and character voices in the Harry Potter books
Author(s)	Alderete Diez, Pilar
Publication Date	2009
Publication Information	Alderete Diez, Pilar. (2009). Harry Potter is funny. The tricky task of translating humour and character voices in the Harry Potter books. Paper presented at the RIA In/Difference a conference on translation at University of Limerick.
Publisher	NUI Galway
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6580

Downloaded 2024-03-13T09:25:48Z

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



**‘Harry Potter is funny’ - The tricky task of translating humour and character voices
in the Harry Potter books.**

María del Pilar Alderete-Diez,
Spanish Department, National University of Galway, Ireland.

To Adrian, my nephew

ABSTRACT

Harry Potter (HP) has been translated into 45 languages, including Ancient Greek and Latin. It has also been adapted for an American-English audience, with minor but significant changes. Most HP translators have been daunted by the amount of specific terms and names. This specific lexicon has been the main concern in the translation of these books and translator choices have varied from book to book and from language to language. In the Spanish translations, they borrow the neologism in spite of the loss of meaning. The interviews that I carried out with a number of official HP translators highlighted how practical issues such as time constraints and editorial practice can determine translators’ decisions.

My presentation is mainly based on Spanish official translation of the fifth book, ‘Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix’ (OoTP), but I would like to shift the emphasis of HP translation studies towards a different issue: humour and linguistic variation. By analyzing chapter 4 of this book and comparing my own translation to the official version, I have explored the translation of comedy and character voice. The Spanish translations of the HP books have tended to standardize the variation within the book in terms of characters’ speech, decreasing the comic effect in the process. With all this in mind, the principle of equivalent effect, as stated in Nida’s work, needs to be reconsidered, however difficult it may be to measure and however much it needs to be inscribed in a given cultural context. Therefore, the translation of comedy and characters’ speech raises again the issue of equivalent effect, abandoned in translation studies for its lack of scientific approach. This presentation is based on a descriptive study that tries to systematize the analysis of comedy and offer techniques for the translation of character speech. It attempts at reconciling theory

and functional practice, by showing that in order to achieve successful translation sometimes translators have to carry out detailed linguistic analysis in order to support their risky subjective choices in the search of a more aligned translated text both to the source text (ST) and the target audience.

Thanks to Mel Boland, Anna Pairaló, Alberto Avezuela and Tania Santos for their ultimate support. Thanks to Máire Nic Mháolain, Emily Huws and Sumalee Bumroongsook, who kindly replied to my interview.

* * *

In 2003 the International Federation of Translators celebrated its 50th anniversary. The highlight of their conference that year was their UNESCO Literary Translators Committee Round Table devoted to the translators of J.K. Rowling's work in order to underline their vital contribution to the worldwide popularity of her writing. This round table raised several issues, in particular cultural boundaries, and contractual constraints set by Warner Bros¹. Their major concern seems to be the pressure for speed translation. With increasing English bilingualism in the world and the expectations that the marketing of Harry Potter has created, the phenomenon of online pirate translation has become a real concern for publishing companies. Pirate translations can be produced much faster than the official ones because they are normally the product of translating and editing teams, with several unqualified translators working on different chapters at once and as they are published online, their publication is cheaper and automated. The quality of some of these translations often leaves a lot to be desired, but when a text is offered as a translation it is quite readily acknowledged as an accurate one (Tourey: 26). Harry Potter (hereafter HP) fans who do not speak English are eager to find out about the story in the new book and many of them will be satisfied with just a summary of the plot. This situation is starting to change because the profusion of these pirate translations has made HP readers more aware of the process of translation and therefore critical of the translator's decisions, as Klaus Fritz, the German translator has declared² and Máire Nic Mhaoláin, the Irish translator has explained in her interview:

An older girl from secondary school, not a native speaker but goes to an Irish school, she wrote a review for one of the Irish language magazines [...]

she was very positive but she did have a few negative points [...]. She didn't like the fact that Hagrid spoke perfect grammatical Irish. This is true. I mean that was her own reflection. What did she say? That there was not a single command of an error.

Publishing companies hurry from the publication date of the original in order to see what company manages to have it on the market first. In the case of minority languages, such as the case of Catalan, the speed needs to be doubled because their translation has to compete with the original as well as the Spanish versions –pirate and official. All this translates into tighter deadlines, which do not allow the research and analysis that a literary translation may entail – for example, in the case of the Norwegian translator, he had two months to translate 'Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix' (hereafter OoTP).

My own translation started as a pirate one. My nephew was eager to know what had happened in the fifth book and I started translating the first seven chapters for him, in advance of the official Spanish version. The trigger for this research was my nephew's comment when he was asked in February 2004 how he was enjoying the official translation which had just been published and he had purchased immediately. 'Harry Potter is funny, but this book is boring', he said. In my opinion, OoTP was indeed funny, so I decided to carry out a comparison between my version and the official one in order to explain what my nephew meant and how exactly the humour had been lost.

I researched for all the interviews and translators' commentaries that I could find in order to verify if they had had a problem with humour. The only reference I could find to Gemma Rovira Ortega (Spanish Translator of the fifth and the sixth book) is an article in which she is quoted to have said that 'she did not want the reader to notice the change in translator in the fifth book'³. This shows her intention to be consistent. The previous three Spanish books had been translated by a team of two translators and the first book, by a single translator, who collaborated later on in the following books.

Among other concerns, many HP translators share this urge for consistency and team work. However, teams of translators are not common in the HP translations. For instance, in the case of Swedish, Lena Fries Gedin has explained that the amount of invented terminology is daunting for a single translator. She declared 'it was hard to find time to check

everything for consistency with the earlier books'⁴, but other translators have acknowledged that the use of the internet and technology helped them to a great extent. Some HP translators have also expressed their wish to have a closer contact with the author.

HP translators do not go into detail about the treatment of humour in their translations. They gloss over the techniques used to translate the way in which the characters speak. Ms. Fries Gedin has commented on her difficulty with anagrams, funny names and dialect, especially for the character of Hagrid. Hagrid's dialect sounds similar to the Scottish varieties and his English is mainly uneducated. As a result, it presents a double challenge for the translator to find a parallel dialect and to reflect Hagrid's ungrammatical structures. In my interview with her, Sumalee Bumroongsook, the Thai translator, believes that humour is untranslatable. Máire Nic Mhaoláin, the Irish translator, did not find the first book especially funny but she commented profusely on the issue of dialect.

It seemed that there was a tendency to overlook the comic aspects of the books, whether due to time constraints or beliefs. Thus, I started consulting the bibliography of literature on HP books. Some of J.K. Rowling's critics acknowledge the need to explore the issue of humour in her novels (Granger: 317). The author herself has published a website in the last few years⁵ together with her frequent contributions to the Harry Potter lexicon and other webpages about her work. Together with the interviews, there is probably more information about her work, her plans for the sixth and seventh book and her opinions than for many other books. These interviews provided me with the final clue to the importance of humour in her books. Rowling confirmed that *she* 'really wrote it entirely for *herself*'; it is *her* sense of humour in the books [...] The quirky sense of humour is definitely *hers*⁶'. Talking about how the idea came to mind, she declared that '*she* could just see a lot of comic potential in the idea that wizards walk among us and that we are foolishly blind to the fact that the reason that we keep losing our car keys is that wizards are bewitching them for fun⁷. Elsewhere, she has been quoted as 'someone who collects funny names'⁸. Clearly, there is much more to the books than just humour, but her declarations prove that humour is a conscious and essential element of her novels. In the chapter I have translated, it is recurrently used for characterization. It is linked through conventional patterns and careful timing through the dialogue of the participants. It is intrinsically related to character speech and linguistic style.

This presentation focuses mainly on the issues of the translation of humour and linguistic style, in order to throw some light on the issues of translatability. It highlights the importance of analysis for the translation of literary texts and the influence of professional concerns. It points to further lines of research as a consequence of this study.

Oring states that ‘dialogue seems a particularly suitable mode for joke punch lines’ (92). Chapter Four in *the Order of the Phoenix* is full of dialogue and humour. Characterization depends on the comic elements that the different speakers use throughout the series (Nash: 70)⁹. Based on a close analysis of this chapter, the main obstacles for the translation of Chapter 4 seemed to be:

1. The use of repetition and recurrence
2. The purpose of riddles and mysteries
3. The list of invented terms
4. Word choice –or avoidance-
5. The use of humour
6. The use of linguistic variation

Both humour and mystery solving are based on the concept of shared knowledge (Nash: 9). The use of repetition and recurrence strengthens this bond. In most cases in J.K. Rowling’s books, this shared knowledge is intrinsic to the world that she has created. The presence of riddles that let the reader guess what is actually happening through a ‘careful arrangement of well-timed emphasis’ typical of the structure of jokes (Nash: 25) and ‘breaking the normal expectations of language use’ (Ross: 3) reinforce bond between the reader and the writer. This bond is the basis of the effectiveness of humour.

The closer the bond between the reader and the writer, the most predictable the response can be. Ross suggests that ‘the response is an important factor in counting something as humorous’ (2). According to Nida, this response depends on the decoding ability (2001: 132). Nida’s principle of equivalent effect states that the response of the receptor to the target text (hereafter TT) ‘must be compared with the way in which the original receptors

presumably reacted to the message in its original setting' (Nida & Taber: 1). This effect is measured in terms of:

the similarity of mental processes of all peoples, the similarity of their somatic reactions influenced by the so-called sympathetic nervous system, the range of their cultural experience and the capacity for adjustment to the behavioural patterns of others (Nida, 1964: 53-56)

Ms. Rovira's target audience varies not only in terms of geographical and cultural background but age, sex, social class, education, profession and religion. The source text (hereafter ST) audience reflects the same variation. Even Nida's classification of decoding abilities is not comprehensive of the qualities of all J.K. Rowling's readers¹⁰. Nida has just focused on the native speakers of the language, not bearing in mind that a good deal of readers of literature are non-native speakers with varying degrees of bilingualism and literacy. There is no unified response in either source or target reader group. As a translator for my nephew the effect of most of my words could be easily predictable, but the professional translator needs to rely on the 'language resources to create wit, amusement and laughter' (Nash: 1) and not only in presumed equivalent effect. However, the effect of humour is the first hint for the translator to pay attention to a comic element. In this way, 'translators always play a double role' (Nida, 1981: 20). As a reader, the translator relies on the effects of the words on him or her. As a writer, s/he may or may not reproduce it. The translator is receiver and sender at the same time and has to understand the text in order to understand the language resources and the shared knowledge required to perceive the jokes and then, make the decisions as to how it is best reorganized in the target language.

Let us now turn to the analysis of the sources of humour and linguistic variation in this chapter. There are two important things to bear in mind when dealing with the fundamental dialogic form of this chapter, since it is intrinsically related to the comic aspects of the text. First, the personifications of humour in the series appear: Fred and George Weasley. Secondly, the dialogue is structured like a joke. This structure becomes evident at the end of this chapter. This chapter is full of comic elements and events, ranging from wisecracks to irony and from sarcasm to mockery. Nida points out that in describing meaning, it is crucial to differentiate between two elements: the form and the content (1981: 6). I have

carried out a classification of the meaning of jokes in this manner: 1) Content-dependent and 2) Form-dependent.

1. CONTENT-DEPENDENT.

In this chapter, the jokes that depend only in the meaning conveyed by the content belong to two categories:

a. Classic Visual Humour.

J.K. Rowling uses images of sheer bedlam from cartoons or silent movie features twice in this chapter. The moment when at the end of this chapter Tonks knocks over the troll-leg umbrella stand and the example under analysis are based on the superiority theory, according to which ‘there is an urge to laugh at the downfall of another’ (Ross: 53). These are examples of universal humour and they constitute less of a challenge for a translator.

b. Oddity: The principle of incongruity.

Osgood defined humour as based on the principle of incongruity (4). This theory focuses on the element of surprise, produced by the contradiction between language and meaning or facts about the real world (Ross: 32). The juxtaposition of two strange elements produces a shocking effect.

➤ *The words tumbling over one another.*

- (PA) Las palabras se le tropezaban las unas con las otras como con prisa
- (GRO) Las palabras salieron atropelladamente de su boca

There is no sense of incongruity in Ms. Rovira’s sentence because ‘salir atropelladamente’ is a common collocation in Spanish. My translation creates a funny image because words, unlike people, cannot tumble (‘tropezar’) over one another in Spanish. The adverbial phrase ‘como con prisa’ is placed at the end for emphasis.

2. FORM-DEPENDENT.

The jokes that depend on the meaning conveyed by the form in this chapter can be classified as:

a. Classic British Humour.

Humour is culture-specific. Some jokes are not easily appreciated outside of their country of origin. Although transliteration is possible, it is not necessarily going to be as meaningful as substitution for the natural equivalent (Chiaro: 87). Among the characteristic British comic strategies, there are:

i. Overstatement.

This technique develops by means of exaggeration. Its purpose is to make something more noticeable than usual.

➤ *Hermione was going spare*

- (PA) Hermione se estaba pasando de rosca
- (GRO) Hermione estaba volviéndose loca

This form of humour is less challenging to translate because it is typical of both English and Spanish. In colloquial speech, Spanish exploits the use of hyperbole. The main difference between the official and my translation is that mine tends to use more colloquialisms to render the same idea, in consonance with Ron's character, who utters this sentence.

ii. Understatement.

This technique uses the opposite ironic comment:

➤ *She's been in a right state – said Ron*

- (PA) Ha estado estupenda – dijo Ron

- (GRO) Estaba muy enfadada- explicó Ron

In this first example, Ms. Rovira translates the meaning without any ironic sense; therefore she tones down the humour in the sentence. In the following two examples, she has used the intensifier ‘ya’ and placed ‘Percy’ at the front which generate an impact in terms of comic effect.

- *Anyone who’s in league with Dumbledore can clear out their desks, said George*
 - (PA) cualquiera que esté aliado con Dumbledore puede ir recogiendo su mesa - dijo George
 - (GRO) todo el que tenga algo que ver con Dumbledore ya puede ir vaciando su mesa – dijo George

Spanish does not use this technique of understatement as frequently as English does. Sarcasm would be more common. Alternatives such as ‘ya puede subir a pedir un aumento’ express the sarcastic incongruity produced by the contrast of what is expected and what actually occurs. These alternatives would provide a way of domesticating the humour to a more natural Spanish version.

b. Metafictional humour.

In many cases, humour is metafictional. Jokes are based on another text or literary model to establish a divergent relationship between the joke and the text referred to. Humour is based on markers and rhythm. The joke develops through careful timing. In the previous section, recurrence and repetition have been discussed as aids to this careful pattern. In the pattern of jokes, there is a zonal sequence and a point of reference (Nash: 172). The joke reaches its summit in the punch line. The last sentence in this chapter works as a punch line, marked by its isolation and change of rhythm (Nash: 172).

- *‘Hello Harry’, he said grimly, ‘I see you’ve met my mother’*
 - (PA) Hola, Harry - dijo sombrío - Veo que ya has conocido a mi madre
 - (GRO) - Hola, Harry – lo saludó con gravedad-. Veo que ya has conocido a mi madre

Sirius Black comes out of the door mentioned in the above example and the author marks the end of the riddle with the word ‘grim’ again.

c. Humour in Characterization.

Nida acknowledges that correspondence in terms of register or style is one of the greatest challenges in translation (Mayoral: 47). He distinguishes five levels of stylistic variation: 1. ritual, 2. formal, 3. informal, 4. colloquial and 5. private (Nida, 1996: 14). In Rowling’s works, the different styles are used both in terms of narration and characterization and therefore, are essential in terms of content. The choice of words in character’s speech involves an analysis of the style and the description of the significance of these elements (Nida, 1996: 145). J.K Rowling also uses this technique as a narrator when the characters are described.

i. Description

In order to give shape to the characters in the series, J.K. Rowling uses humour and careful choice of words not only in terms of character’s speech but also in narration. The names that she invents and the verbs and adjectives with which the characters are described contribute to mould their personalities.

- *He thought he heard someone, who was lurking out of sight, snigger.*
 - (PA) tuvo la sensación de oír a alguien al acecho, riéndose a escondidas.
 - (GRO) le pareció oír a alguien que, escondido, reía por lo bajo.

Ms Rovira has kept the structure of the source text with the adjectival clause in front of the verb. My translation probably foregrounds the meaning of ‘lurking’ for ‘acecho’ to clarify that this ‘someone’ is probably Kreacher, making the TT clearer than the ST.

ii. Speech

The way that characters speak is central to the way they are perceived and the relationship the reader establishes with them. In this chapter, the translation of individual speech is even more important, due to the fact that, as the previous section indicated, J.K. Rowling omits the reference to the subject who utters the words at several points in the dialogue. Her characters mainly acquire their distinctive features by the way they speak.

A. Formal vs. Colloquial.

J.K. Rowling alternates between both registers in this chapter. The juxtaposition of these different registers, called *bathos* (Ross: 44), needs to be acknowledged in the translation of this chapter, because it gives the narrative a distinctive style and it aids in distinguishing between the different characters.

➤ *CAN'T'VE WANTED TO THAT MUCH, CAN YOU?*

- (PA) ¡¡Muchísimo!! ¡¡¿no?!!
- (GRO) NO CREO QUE ESO OS PREOCUPARA MUCHO

In this example, the ST spelling is substandard. This gives the narrative a shocking and realistic effect. Ms. Rovira's translation lacks these colloquial connotations. My translation attempts to highlight it by emphasizing the ST sarcasm and making it the shortest to underline the impact of Harry's retort.

➤ *I SUPPOSE YOU'VE BEEN HAVING A REAL LAUGH, HAVEN'T YOU*

- (PA) ¡¡¡ Supongo que os habréis estado echando unas risas ¿no?!!!
- (GRO) SUPONGO QUE OS HABRÉIS REÍDO DE LO LINDO

In this instance, the colloquial feel of this climatic conversation is lost in Ms. Rovira's translation. She uses the phrase 'reírse de lo lindo' which sounds slightly feigned for Harry's way of speaking. Colloquialisms and humour are very important in terms of characterization and therefore, in series such as this one, there needs to be a consistent technique in terms of the way in which characters speak.

B. Characterization.

Let us now examine the style of the main characters in this chapter.

B.1 Harry

➤ *BIG DEAL!*

- (PA) ¡¡¡Vaya cosa!!!
- (GRO) ¡QUÉ BIEN!

➤ *Nicking papers out of bins*

- (PA) mangando periódicos de los cubos de basura
- (GRO) ROBANDO PERIÓDICOS DE LOS CUBOS DE BASURA

Harry's style is young and relaxed. These two examples include colloquialisms. Given that colloquialisms are by and large circumscribed to a geographic variety, Nida advises against using a 'democratic' method putting together words from different dialects or to standardize every informal item in the text (1981: 43). The use of a natural style in Spanish full of real colloquial speech is related to the creation of a bond between the reader and the writer through the characters. In the first case my translation includes a very personalized expression that my nephew uses constantly. In the second case, my choice is for the word 'mangar' to be consistent with the casual register that Harry is using throughout his self-centred rant.

B.2 Hermione

Hermione is the sensible girl in the trio. Therefore, she uses a slightly more formal and careful style than the others. The humour in this case springs from the fact that it often precludes a respondent, someone to laugh at. In this chapter, J.K. Rowling places Harry on the spot and Hermione is the character used to utter the following words, though with no intention of being comic at all.

➤ *‘well, you’d need to read it cover to cover to pick it up but they –um- mention you a couple of times a week’*

- (PA) Bien, tendrías que leerlo de la primera página a la última para encontrarlo, pero ellos... em... ellos te mencionan un par de veces a la semana
- (GRO) - Bueno, tendrías que haberlo leído de cabo a rabo para pillarlo, pero... Bueno, el caso es que te mencionan un par de veces por semana

Even though Hermione uses less formal speech in this example than the one that J.K Rowling normally gives her in an attempt to reduce the painful effect of her words on Harry; my translation does not use colloquialisms like ‘pillar’ for her speech, because I have deemed it more appropriate for Ron’s or for the Weasleys in general .

B.3 The Weasleys: Ron, Fred & George and Ginny.

Ron seems to have a very unique style. Hatim and Mason argue for the need to translate idiolects, since they reflect personal choice of dialect and they are related to the perlocutionary purpose of language and therefore, contain sociocultural meaning (Mayoral: 72). Ron tends to use more slang than the others and in addition, he can be characterized by his tendency to repeat certain phrases such as ‘wicked’ and ‘bloody hell’. One of these phrases is

➤ *Don’t be thick*

- (PA) No seas burro
- (GRO) No seas idiota

The issue with these clichés in Ron’s speech is not so much the way they are translated, since both are equally fitting but rather the fact that as translators, we have to keep repeating them in the book and throughout the series. Otherwise, Ron’s character seems to lose his unique personality in the translated texts.

➤ *Mum found out and went berserk*

- (PA) mi madre las pilló y se subía por las paredes

- (GRO) mamá nos descubrió y se puso hecha una fiera

My translation uses ‘subirse por las paredes’ to convey the meaning of ‘berserk’ for two main reasons. First, it is a colloquial idiom to express when someone is angry or nervous. Second, they produce a comic effect. Due to the suspension of disbelief that the reader subscribes to while in the Wizarding World, Mrs. Weasley might as well literally be ‘up the walls’. The expression ‘ponerse hecha una fiera’ is valid as well and in consonance with the character in question.

➤ *Keeping tabs on them, you know*

- (PA) siguiéndoles los pasos, y eso ...
- (GRO) están siguiendo a conocidos mortífagos, vigilándolos...

GRO omits tags and gap-fillers, which convey the conversational feeling of this text.

➤ *Said Ron, with a look of dawning comprehension*

- (PA) con una mirada de haberse desayunado justo en ese momento.
- (GRO) como si acabara de comprenderlo.

My translation uses a very local colloquialism: ‘desayunarse’. The unusual reflexive sense of this verb conveys exactly the meaning of sudden and enlightened realization of an obvious idea, together with the fact that there is a reference to early morning, ‘breakfast’ and ‘dawning’ as in the ST. Ron’s colloquial speech is definitely best found in his use of ‘mate’ and the structure of his narrative paragraphs. In the first case, Ms. Rovira prefers the neutral use of the proper name. My translation uses the colloquialism ‘tío’.

➤ *We did, mate – said Ron*

- (PA) Dijo Ron- Lo hicimos, tío.
- (GRO) Contestó Ron -Se lo dijimos, Harry

Fred & George represent a traditional duet of jokers. In their case, humour also represents a mode of attack and a line of defence (Nash: 1) and these twins show the effects of this purpose of humour. They are representative of the ‘three-actor’ framework, a commonplace

in comedy. The trio - including the person who tells the joke, the addressee and the victim of the joke - have conventionally been shaped in dyadic traditions, such as Laurel and Hardy, through the use of sarcasm and boasting, in which I have used a cultural equivalent to reinforce the impact of the joke:

➤ *With distinction*

- (PA) Matrícula de honor
- (GRO) Con muy buena nota

GRO chooses a neutral explanation of the phrase, because it is unlikely that the different school systems in the Spanish American world use the same grade system.

Their speech is also full of colloquialisms, when dealing with a serious matter:

➤ *Percy ought to have realized Crouch was off his rocker [...] But you know Percy, Crouch left him in charge, he wasn't going to complain*

- (PA) Percy tendría que haberse dado cuenta de que Crouch estaba de remate [...] Pero ya sabes cómo es Percy. Crouch le dejó al cargo, no iba a ir a quejarse...
- (GRO) Percy debería haberse dado cuenta de que Crouch estaba chiflado [...] Pero ya conoces a Percy: Crouch lo había dejado al mando, y él no iba a protestar.

The three underlined colloquialisms in my translation reinforce the conversation rhythm of this section in the chapter. The omission of 'loco' in the collocation 'loco de remate' and the addition of 'ir' in 'iba a ir' are examples of colloquial creativity.

They use mockery as well:

➤ *She's got a job at Gringotts to eemprove 'er Eeenglish*

- (PA) Consiguió un trabajo en Gringotts para *mejogag su anglées*.
- (GRO) Ha aceptado un empleo en Gringotts para << pegfeccionag>> su inglés

Fred is mocking the French accent of his eldest brother's girl-friend. Ms. Rovira decided to base the mockery on one word: 'improve'. In the ST the joke extends to three words. I decided to play with all three words, even though I make the assumption that our reader would understand the word 'anglés' as a French foreign realization of the Spanish word 'inglés'.

Ginny has appeared since the second book, but has not really developed her own voice until this book. Her style is intimate and colloquial, slightly imitating Ron's or her twin brothers' variety. My translation uses the underlined colloquialism to mark the speech of the Weasley family.

➤ *It's a no-go with the Extendable Ears, she's gone and put an Imperturbable Charm on the kitchen door.*

- (PA) No vais a llegar a ningún sitio con las orejas extensibles, ha ido, y ¡hala!, ha puesto un encantamiento impassibilizador en la puerta de la cocina.
- (GRO) No vais a conseguir nada con las orejas extensibles. Mamá le ha hecho un encantamiento de impassibilidad a la puerta de la cocina.

In both, GRO and PA versions, there is a subtle twist in the meaning of the phrase 'no-go', which implies impossibility to proceed. In my translation, 'no váis a llegar a ningún sitio' implies 'impossibility of success'. I used this expression because of the equivalence in terms of a verb of movement 'to go' – 'llegar'.

CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, humour in this chapter is universal, based on content and creative images and formal, exploiting different comic strategies that require analysis and creative transposition. The use of humour in our ST is also linked to the choice of linguistic variation. Humour highlights that sense is acquired not by what the characters are saying but by the way they are expressing themselves. These ways can be described in terms of their socio and idiolects. Ms. Rovira's translation has attempted a more neutral style easier for her readers

to understand through the avoidance of colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions. The reader of my translation was clearly defined so my word choice could be more local and varied in terms of register. My reader and I had a greater amount of shared knowledge both in terms of the humour and in terms of the language varieties at play.

This analysis and classification of the main differences between Ms. Rovira's translation and my translation have led me to question the nature and purpose of humour and the possibility of its translation. Even though the HP series has been considered children's literature, the statistics show that forty eight percent of consumers of this type of literature are over 13 years of age. The presupposition that the HP books belong to this genre has guided some of the official translator's decisions. Translated children's literature in Spanish tends to use a fossilized style, full of clichés and 'comic strip' artificial language. Nida rejects artificial forms of 'translationese' and the language used by older generations (Mayoral: 53). This type of language manifests itself in the translation of another of Ronald Weasley's phrases.

More difficult to ascertain is purpose or *skopos*. The translator sometimes has to decide what the main purpose of the book and the translation is. In a book as multifaceted as this one, simplifying the *skopos* may result in simplifying the text.

This research has led me to process, product and theory oriented conclusions. In the process of translation, humour provides an essential key to understanding the way in which the HP world works. Humour is produced as a result of the perlocutionary function of language. 'A joke is something that is happening to the hearer at the moment of telling' (Ross: 92). Thus, humour, perhaps more than any other narrative genre, is located in the present time and place and typically develops in dialogue in order to create a surrounding present chronotope in which the reader becomes, in some sense, another character (Ross: 92). In this way, J.K. Rowling uses humour in order to get the reader involved in the narrative. She also uses colloquial speech to develop the bond between both reader and writer and the characters that she has created.

In terms of product, the act of reading is directly influenced by this perlocutionary function. Readers respond to the translated text depending on the effect that this text has on them.

This idea is related to Nida's principle of equivalent effect. As discussed above, the principle of equivalent effect is impossible to measure in terms of the official translation because the audience varies in terms of country, age and education, but it is still essential for the translation of humour. Nida resolves the question of immeasurability by defining the task of the translator as the 'reproduction of the meaning as understood by the (ST) writer' (Nida & Taber: 8). This fact is the basis of complaints voiced by several translators about the lack of help on the part of J.K. Rowling and the breeding ground for intentional fallacies. The author's understanding of the book can only be ascertained by public statements, interviews or any other evidence. Otherwise, the translator can only speculate about the author's intention. Contradictorily, Nida and Taber believe that absolute communication is unattainable and no two people may ever 'understand words in exactly the same manner' (1969: 4). My analysis has proved that the principle of equivalent effect is useful as a tool for the surveying of the ST, in terms of the translator as an 'especial' reader. The effect of the text is subjective and therefore different for every reader, but as Newmark states in his commentaries, 'a sense of humour is individual as well as universal and/or cultural' (18). If something makes me laugh, it may make someone else laugh as well. The effect of humour works as a pointer for the translator to analyse how the effect has been worked in the text through the language resources available to create laughter (Nash: 1). It is important for the translator to realize that humour is 'the manipulation of language and logic' (Nash: 110), systems that also participate in the universal and as a result, they are perfectly translatable (Newmark: 22). This study shows that humour depends significantly on the context and the amount of shared knowledge. This is the reason why humour is culturally bound in many cases. It is the task of translators to understand these linguistic strategies and the amount of shared knowledge required to understand the joke and to use the flexibility of language to translate it into the target language through the same or similar techniques.

The next challenge humour poses to the translator is its poetic function. The meaning of humour is bound in content and form. Generally speaking, the more form-bound a joke is, according to Nida, the more formal –closer to the physical form of the ST- is the necessary equivalence, but the more content-bound, the more dynamic –closer to the meaning (1964: 43). In humour, this dichotomy content/form is clearly deconstructed. The economy in humour is based on this inherent relation. In terms of content, Ms. Rovira's translation

tends to simplify the nonsense and incongruity of the images and collocations. Her translation is more explanatory and dynamic. Consequently, it assists in the narration of the story and the amount of shared knowledge required to understand Ms. Rovira's text is smaller. Nevertheless, this does not promote the creation of the bond between reader, writer and characters. My translation attempts to reproduce the unusual arrangement of elements in creative language and to enhance the reader's understanding ability. My translation tries to mirror the defamiliarizing parts of incongruous humour.

In any case, this presentation also focused on the way J.K. Rowling exploits linguistic variation. The alternation of varieties in the text is used in narrative mainly for comic effect; and characterization, both in narrative and dialogue, fulfilling the phatic function of language. The switching of social variation in the ST forces the translator to choose a geographical variety in order to translate these formal/informal contrasts. The word choice of the translator has immediate marketing consequences, which has been evidenced by the amount of intralingual translation in the English version published by Scholastic in North America. This questions the necessity for one or several translations in the Spanish-speaking world. Nida and Taber (1969: 199) argue for contextual consistency. In other words, translating the source language expression by that phrase in the target language which best matches each context. The possibility of editing different versions in the Spanish spoken in different countries would not be very beneficial for the translator because then there would be internal competition within one language, which would translate into tighter constraints and deadlines. It is difficult to find a solution to this problem, since the insufficient literature published on the translation of linguistic variation does not offer any positive results. The wealth of linguistic variation and word choice in Rowling's narrative needs to be borne in mind, even though this may lead to the break with translating conventions, such as Máire Nic Mháolain's use of colloquialisms or words that do not appear in dictionaries but which are widely and currently used. Likewise, Zauberga (92) points out how taboo words are not translated or weakened. She argues that literary translations cannot be considered as icons of linguistic righteousness any longer (94).

As a writer, the translator is a speaker of his/her own variety. S/he might be educated enough to be able to move up and down the scale of social registers, but it is more unlikely s/he would be able to move consistently along the geographical continuum of language

varieties. The translation of sociolect in Rowling's text is essential not only in terms of narrative style, but also in terms of content and character identity. Without this variation, there are no individual characters; without individual characters, there is no fictional world; without a fictional world, there is no sense at a textual level. Here lies the danger of sense-for-sense translation at level of sentence, especially in dialogue. Nida (1997: 105) states that content must be preserved at any cost. The intrinsic relation between form and content in humour and idiolect or linguistic variety renders form as equally important since it also carries essential meaning, which can only be understood through a time-consuming process of analysis. This research has underlined that analysis is essential for literary translation. The speed required from HP translators needs to be reconsidered in terms of this need for analysis. Teams of translators engaging in analysis, composition and editing could speed up the process. The dangers of the inconsistency that this teamwork could lead to may be solved by the coordination of efforts and tools such as translation memories recording the terminology and colloquialisms previously used in other books and their location in the books.

Nida (1964: 60) highlights that the background of the translator is a determining factor in the translation process and quality of the product. At least one of the translators in the team needs to be an expert on the HP world. Nowadays, the truth is that these experts are mainly teenagers. In the case of chapter four, it would have been useful to have a younger team member, fluent in colloquial language, in order to check the consistency and use of the speech of the characters. This is the kind of intergenerational team work promoted in the web pirate translations. It is also important to bear in mind that school jargon is one of those specific languages that quickly goes out of fashion. The translator should not use a large amount of colloquialisms that are not going to be fashionable in weeks or months.

This study argues against the impossibility of translating humour. As Nida and Taber affirm if our goal is the 'exact mirroring of discrete items', then translation is definitely impossible (98). However, if we want to find an explanation in functional terms, translation – or transformation - is quite possible (99). In this sense, creativity, a good command of linguistic resources and an awareness of the flexibility of language are the best allies for the translation of humour.

Address for correspondence:

Pilar Alderete-Diez
AM342 Spanish
National University of Ireland, Galway
University Road,
Newcastle,
Galway
Ireland
Pilar.alderete@nuigalway.ie

REFERENCES

- Brislin, R.W. (ed.) (1979) *Translation: Applications and Research*. New York: Gardner Press.
- Chiaro, D. (1992) *The Language of Jokes. Analyzing Verbal Play*. London: Routledge.
- Granger, J. (2002) *The Key to Harry Potter*. Port Hadlock: Zossima Press.
- Mayoral Asensio, R. (1999) *La Traducción de la Variación Lingüística*. Uertere, Hermeneus: Universidad de Valladolid.
- Nash, W. (1985) *The Language of Humour*. Longman: London.
- Newmark, P. (1995) *Paragraphs on Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Nida, E. (2002) *Contexts in Translating*. London: John Benjamins.
- (2001) 'Principles of Correspondence' in Venuti, L. London: Routledge, pp. 126-140.
- (1997) *The Sociolinguistics of Interlingual Communication*, Bruxelles: Les Éditions du Hazard.
- (1981) *Meaning Across Cultures*, Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY.
- (1979) 'A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation of Theories of Translation' in Brislin, R.W. New York: Gardner Press, pp. 47-91.
- (1964) *Towards a Science of Translating*, Leiden: Brill.
- Nida, E. & C. Taber (1969) *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: Brill.
- Oring, E. (1992) *Jokes and Their Relations*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Osgood, C.E., G.J. Suci and P.H. Tannenbaum (1971) *The Measurement of Meaning*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Ross, A. (1998) *The Language of Humour*. London: Routledge.

Thelen, M. and B. Lewandowska-tomaszczyk (1996) *Translation and Meaning, Part 3*. Maastricht: UPM.

Toury, G. (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Venuti, L. (2001) *The Translation Studies: A Reader*. London: Routledge.

Zauberga, I. (1996) 'Interaction of Connotational Meaning and Cultural Transorientation in Translation' in Thelen, M. and B. Lewandowska-tomaszczyk, Maastricht: UPM, pp. 89-96.

Articles on the web:

Harry Potter Translators and Translations:

Translation into Spanish article:

<http://jomaweb.blogalia.com/historias/9679>

'Harry Potter y las Evocaciones Perdidas' by M.D. González and Mt. Veiga:

<http://www.literaturas.com/02infantiljuvenilDoloresgonzalezteresaveiga.htm>

Review of Klaus Fritz work (German Translator):

<http://german.about.com/library/weekly/aa011112a.htm>

Interview with Emily Huws (Welsh Translator):

<http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk/0900entertainment/1900playtime/page.cfm?objectid=13412315&method=full&siteid=50082>

Interview with Lena Fries Gedin (Swedish Translator):

<http://www.swedishbookreview.com/old/2002s-gedin.html>

Translating the adventures of Harry Potter into Czech

<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/44547>

Interview with Lia Wyler (Brazilian Translator)

<http://blobalization.info/reorganization/?q=node/view/121>

Translation into Latin:

<http://www.opinionjournal.com/la/?id=110005786>

Harry Potter In Ancient Greek:

http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/harry_potter.htm

Translating Harry by S. Goldstein:

http://www.bytelevel.com/global/translating_harry_potter.html

Harry Potter takes up Baseball by J. Munday:

<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Harry%20Potter%20in%20translation>

‘Harry Potter and the Disillusioned Editor’ by L. WHITED:
<http://www.roanoke.com/columnists/whited/5210.html>

General Harry Potter in translation:

- **http://www.explore-reading.com/literature/H/Harry_Potter_in_translation.html**
- **http://open-encyclopedia.com/Harry_Potter_in_translation**

Interviews with JK. Rowling:

- **<http://www.mugglenet.com/bbcinterview1.shtml>**
- **<http://www.angelfire.com/mi3/cookarama/bbcintaug99.html>**
- **<http://www.cliphoto.com/potter/interview.htm>**
- **<http://aww.ninemsn.com.au/aww/Books/articles/Authorinterview/article244.asp>**

General Harry Potter websources:

- **<http://www.hp-lexicon.org/>**
- **<http://www.eldiccionario.org/>**
- **<http://www.jkrowling.com/>**
- **<http://www.eulenfeder.de/hpliteratur.html>**
- **<http://www.harrylatino.com/>**

The importance that Translation in the British Council and marketing constraints:

- **<http://www2.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature-literarytranslation-intro.htm>**

In Conversation with Itamar Even-Zohar about Literary and Culture Theory’ by Sales Salvador (2003):

- **[http://clwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clweb02-3/sales\(even-zohar\)02.html](http://clwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clweb02-3/sales(even-zohar)02.html)**

¹ Escorihuela – the Catalan translator – declared that Warner Bros wanted her to sign a contract whereby HP translators yield to the film studio the copyrights of all the translated terms to avoid paying for them when they use these translations for their merchandising (<http://jomaweb.blogalia.com/historias/9679/>).

² See <http://german.about.com/library/weekly/aa011112a.htm/>.

³ See <http://jomaweb.blogalia.com/historias/9679/>.

⁴ See <http://www.swedishbookreview.com/old/2002s-gedin.html>.

⁵ See <http://www.jkrowling.com/>.

⁶ See

<http://aww.ninemsn.com.au/aww/Books/articles/Authorinterview/article244.asp/>.

⁷ See <http://www.cliphoto.com/potter/interview.htm//>.

⁸ See <http://www.angelfire.com/mi3/cookarama/bbcintaug99.html//>.

⁹ Rowling has acknowledged the influences of Dickens and Austen. These writers rely on humour as a means of constructing character and plot (Ross: 79, 82).

¹⁰ For this classification, see Nida, 1964: 143.