

## Book review

**Dore, Margherita (2022). *Humour in Self-Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.**

Translating humour poses a demanding challenge where one must always take into account not only the linguistic aspect, but also the cultural. The question is: Can this feat be made even more difficult when the original author and translator are the same person? This, in addition to the reasons one would drive themselves to self-translate, are addressed in this engaging volume edited by Margherita Dore.

This edited collection aims at exploring the phenomenon of humour in self-translation, bringing together insights and case studies from various cultural and linguistic milieus and diverse genres. In the first part of her introduction “Humour in self-translation: Reasons and rationale”, Dore compares the phenomenon of migration to multilingualism and self-translation, unveiling the characteristics of humour in self-translation and the reasons that drive its appearance. She claims that, although migration is often associated with feelings of despair and loss, it can often bring to the fore moments of happiness, humour and laughter. One defining aspect of self-translation is the degree of freedom self-translators enjoy compared to “allographic translators” (p. 6).<sup>1</sup> Drawing on Polezzi’s words, Dore suggests that “translation not only marks the boundaries of who we are as individuals and groups” but it is a central factor aiding us to “understand what happens when people enter new social and linguistic settings” (p. 3). Dore, referring to Venzo and Petkovic’s chapter in the volume, acknowledges that self-translators are “‘linguistic nomads’, who use comedy as a means to express the connections and disconnections that are an inherent part of their hybrid and multicultural identities” (p. 6).

The literature on humour in self-translation is scarce; there are nonetheless some notable exceptions (see Noonan, 2013; Palmieri, 2017, 2018, etc.). The uniqueness of this book rests in the fact that it combines several linguistic and cultural settings and features diverse approaches to humour in self-translation. The book consists of two parts: Part 1 unfolds by analysing case studies ranging from poetry to stage to the screen, and Part 2 presents the experimental approaches used to transfer humour in self-translation. Both parts build on each other, presenting an overview of self-translated humour in various settings. The first, entitled “From poetry to the screen” opens with the chapter by Thomas David Chaves “Mockery and poetic satire: Humour in self-translated Philippine protest poetry”. Here the author explores the phenomenon of poetic self-translation in the Philippines, focusing on the work of four Filipino poets and self-translators. He reports that although self-translation can be regarded as “idiosyncratic”, there seems to be a tendency, an “impulse among bi-, tri-, and multilingual writers” to self-translate, especially by recreating their own humorous puns (p. 19). The author suggests that the main reason behind self-translation in the Philippines is “sociological, that is, to establish one’s professional capital [...] and to mark them off from those poets who write in one preferred language” (p. 15).

<sup>1</sup> When the translator is a different person from the author of the original text.

In Chapter 3 “Punning herself: Nancy Huston’s puns in two self-translated novels”, Marlisa Richters focuses on wordplay from two early, self-translated novels by the Canadian author Nancy Huston, whose novels display a great degree of difficulty to translate since plays on words are common. The next chapter “From traduttore, traditore to traduttore, creatore: Creative subversion in the self-translations of Ha Jin and Pai Hsien-yung” delves into the untranslatability of humour in self-translation. Drawing on the works of Ha Jin and the Taiwanese exiled author Pai Hsien-yung and their self-translated English-Mandarin short stories, Ursula Deser Friedman explores cases of “un-translation, substitution and creative augmentation” in literary self-translation. Friedman notes that “creative subversion enables the self-translator to enrich the source text while catering to target readers’ aesthetic preferences” (p. 81). She concludes that self-translation is a process of reinterpreting the original source text while recreating a new one (p. 81). In Chapter 5 “‘Humourizing’ the theatre of the absurd through reworking and (self-)translation: Turkish theatrical tradition in search of its own voice”, Başak Ergil examines cases of reworkings and re-canonisations of the theatre of the absurd, taking as a case study the work of actor/director Ferhan Şensoy and the theatre company Tiyatrotem. Ergil concludes that these instances are “unique examples of Turkish theatre creating its own voice in the face of a series of westernisation movements” that date from the Ottoman period to the present day (p. 109).

Moving on to the next chapter “Humour, language variation and self-translation in stand-up comedy”, Dore explores self-translation, language variation and humour in the stand-up comedies of Marsha De Salvatore. Dore summarises the techniques used by De Salvatore and explains that “localising and compensatory strategies make the Italian scripts as effective as the English versions in triggering humour and successfully creating comedian-audience affiliation” (p. 113). The first part of the volume ends with the chapter “Humour and self-interpreting in the media: The communicative ethos and the authenticity contract in *late-night shows*” by Pedro Jesús Castillo Ortiz. The author discusses humour and self-interpreting in the media and explores the highly unexplored topic of humour in self-interpreting, focusing on the strategies and mechanisms applied in order to produce humour in this specific modality.

Part 2 begins with the chapter by Anna Sasaki entitled “iTranslate or iWrite? A case study of Yoneyama Hiroko’s picture book self-translation”. Humour in children’s literature gravitates between two poles: acceptability and adequacy. Framing her findings on Toury’s (1995) concepts of *acceptability* and *adequacy*, Sasaki examines the difficulties of rendering humour for picture books. As she claims:

In the context of self-translation, to achieve the same humorous effect, the author-translator needs to evaluate the familiarity of various cultural attributes of emotions. Thus, the layer of foreignness in translation may act as a barrier which prevents from convincing a child-reader in the humorous intent (p. 192).

This brings us to Chapter 9 “Lost and found in humour self-translation: Difficulty to realisation, distance to re-creation” where Tomoko Takahashi investigates humour translation, based on her own experience of translating her autobiography from Japanese to English. She describes this experience involving both “battles against untranslatability” and creative rewriting processes (p. 195). In Chapter 10 “How funny am I? Humour, self-translation and translation of the self”, Paul Venzo & David Petkovic closely look at how humour can be transferred in self-translation. Based on Eco’s (2004) notion of translation as negotiation, the authors explore their own experience of self-translation and “discover that humour functions as a drawbridge between languages, cultures and national identities: sometimes meeting, and sometimes not” (p. 215). Pietro Luigi Iaia in the next chapter entitled “Multimodal strategies of creation and self-translation of humorous discourse in image-macro memes” analyses multimodal strategies involved in the creation and self-translation of humorous discourse in

image-macro memes. He examines the strategies of textualisation and re-textualisation activated while undergraduate students were asked to recreate and self-translate humorous memes.

In his epilogue “Second thoughts about second versions: Self-translation and humour”, Rainier Grutman reflects on the cultural, linguistic, and rhetorical aspects of self-translation. Purposefully deciding to pay careful attention to the phenomenon of self-translation, he affirms that “Being able to work simultaneously on two texts in two languages, is perhaps the single most spectacular feature of self-translation. This is what makes it stand out among translational practices in general” (p. 271).

The book provides invaluable insights into the sociolinguistic and sociopolitical factors that influence humour research and production, and their influence on self-translation. Overall, due to its accessible style and broad in-depth scholarly analysis of the phenomenon of humour in self-translation, scholars and researchers alike will be brought on an exploratory voyage which is sure to enthuse along the way.

**Loukia Kostopoulou**

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

lkostop@frl.auth.gr

## **References**

- Eco, U. (2004). *Mouse or rat? Translation as negotiation*. Phoenix.
- Noonan, W. (2013). Self-translation, self-reflection, self-derision: Samuel Beckett’s bilingual humour’. *Self-Translation: Brokering originality in hybrid culture* (pp. 159-176). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Palmieri, G. (2017). Oral self-translation of stand-up comedy and its (mental) text: A theoretical model. *Humour: International Journal of Humour Research*, 30(2), 193-210.
- Palmieri, G. (2018). Self-translation and orality: The case of bilingual stand-up comedy. *Perspectives*, 26(3), 422-434.
- Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies – and beyond*. John Benjamins.