

“I’D TAKE A P IN THE GUTTER OVER JULIA  
ROBERTS ANY TIME”:  
Comparing professional and amateur translations of  
word play in *How I met your mother*

Bachelor’s thesis  
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Suomalaisina olemme tottuneet siihen, että suuressa osassa televisio-ohjelmistamme on tekstitykset. Jos kielitaitomme on hyvä, huomaamme kuitenkin usein virheitä tekstien käännöksissä. Huolimattomuusvirheiden lisäksi kääntäjä on saattanut käsittää jotain väärin tai hänellä on ollut muuten hankaluuksia kääntää jokin tietty repliikki. Erityisen mieleenpainuvia käännöksiä huomaa etenkin komediasarjoissa, joissa hankalasti käännettävät sanaleikit ovat suuressa osassa. Sanaleikkejä käännettäessä jokaisella kääntäjällä on omat käännösstrategiansa ja tämä vuoksi yksikään käännös ei ole täysin samanlainen. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena onkin tarkastella sanaleikkien kääntämistä kahden eri käännöksen avulla.

Aineistona tutkielmassa on käytetty amerikkalaista komediasarjaa *How I met your mother* (suom. Ensisilmäyksellä). Sarja on tunnettu runsaista sanaleikeistään, joten sen pohjalta löytyi odotetusti runsaasti tutkimusmateriaalia. Aineiston keräyksessä katsottiin ensimmäinen kausi sarjasta DVD:ltä suomalaisilla teksteillä, jotka on kirjoittanut koulutettu kääntäjä. Samalla kirjoitettiin ylös kaikki havaitut sanaleikit ja niiden käännökset. Tämän jälkeen verrattiin käännöksiä Internetistä löytyneisiin amatöörikäännöksiin samasta sarjasta, joita ovat kirjoittaneet kääntämisestä kiinnostuneet nimimerkillä esiintyvät suomalaiset tai suomenkielentaitoiset henkilöt. Näistä amatöörikäännöksistä oli saatavilla transkriptit, joten vertailun pystyi suorittamaan katsomatta sarjaa uudestaan. Vertailun pohjalta valittiin sanaleikeistä mielenkiintoisimmat esimerkit ja asetettiin ne kuuden eri kategorian alle. Kategoriat syntyivät suurilta osin leksikaalisien suhteiden pohjalta, mutta myös kulttuurisidonnaiset sanaleikit otettiin huomioon.

Tutkielman tuloksissa kävi ilmi, että sekä koulutetun kääntäjän että amatöörikääntäjien tekstityksissä oli sekä kömpelöitä että melko onnistuneita käännöksiä. Kääntäjät olivat lähestyneet kääntämistä käyttäen eri strategioita, mutta suurimmassa osassa esimerkeistä käännökset olivat laadultaan huonompia kuin alkuperäiset repliikit. Syy tähän löytyy sanaleikkien kääntämisen hankaluudesta. Ainoastaan korvaamalla alkuperäisen sanaleikin vastaavalla suomen kieleen ja ehkä myös kulttuuriin sopivalla sanaleikillä, onnistuivat kääntäjät säilyttämään vitsin hauskana katsojille, joiden informaatio sarjan sisällöstä perustuu kuviin ja tekstityksiin.

Key words: word play, audio visual translation, subtitling

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

There are three different ways that are used to translate television programmes and these are dubbing, narrating and subtitling (Immonen 2008:8-10). The most common way to translate TV programmes in Finland is subtitling (Vertanen 2007:149). Reasons for this are that narrating is limited to certain programmes such as documentaries, where the images are important and should not be covered by text (Immonen: 2008:8-9) and dubbing is more expensive than creating subtitles (Vertanen 2007:149) and therefore mostly used only in children's programmes. Most of the TV programmes that air in Finnish television are foreign and as a result, there is a great deal of translating to do. However, screen translation can be a challenging task, especially if the show in need of translation is a comedy. Comedies often include word play, which is a way of creating amusement and word play rarely works the same way in different languages. The comic effect is easily lost if linguistic games are translated directly. Accordingly, translating word play requires the translator to put even more thought into the translations than usual.

The aim of the present study is to compare professional and amateur translations by looking at a specific sitcom *How I met your mother*. The focus is on word play, since it can be especially difficult to translate. Moreover, it will be interesting to see two translations of different linguistic games, especially when one of the translations is done by a professional and the other one by different amateur translators. I expect the translation strategies of these two to differ. One reason for this is that professional translators have certain limitations, in terms of length for example, and the amateur translators do not apply the same rules in their translations. Another hypothesis is that there will be some awkward translations, some of which may create difficulties for the viewer to understand the intended joke. I believe that the results of the current study can bring something new to the area of audio visual translation studies. Studying word play is quite common and some comparative research has also been done, but by putting these two together and using not only professional translations, but moreover those of amateurs, the results can be discussed from several points of view.

In the present paper I shall first introduce some theory on translation, discuss what difficulties translators face and what we can learn from comparing different translations. The following theory sections focus on word play and screen translation. After the theory, I will explain the methods used

to collect the data, and present my research questions. Then I will move on to the results and discussion section of the study, where I intend to answer the questions.

## **2 TRANSLATION, WORD PLAY AND SUBTITLING**

In the theory section of the current study, some theory background on translation is presented, including what approaches have been stressed in translation through time and the challenges that translators face in their work. In addition, it is explained why each translation is different and how comparing translations can give us insight on different translation strategies. After this the focus turns to word play, where the term word play and how translating different types of word play can turn out to be quite complicated is discussed. In addition, different types of semantic qualities related to word play are presented. The focus is on categories that became apparent in the present study. Lastly, the field of audio visual translation and especially subtitling is presented. Some terms will be explained and the conventions related to subtitling TV programmes and what difficulties and limitations translators face when translating such material are presented. In addition, there will be some information on previous studies done on the field. All of these sections provide insight to the area of study before moving on to the actual data.

### **2.1 Translating in general**

According to Bassnett (2002:11), the general understanding of the term translation includes "rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL)", while preserving the meaning of the original text and the structures of the source language without the target language structure becoming distorted. Another definition is that translation is a tool of communication, where linguistic and cultural boundaries are involved (Hatim and Mason 1999:1). From these definitions, we can already conclude that the process of translation is not as simple as it may seem. Nevertheless, often translation has been perceived as a mechanical process, an activity that anyone with the basic knowledge of a foreign language is able to perform (Bassnett 2002:12). The truth is, however, that translating is an extremely complex matter, where the translator is bound to make choices between different translation strategies and make compromises when considering what to include in the final translation (Vehmas-Lehto 1999:16). Because of this, different translators always produce different translations. As Bassnett (2002:33) states, it is an established fact in translation studies that if we give the same poem to a dozen translators, we will get a dozen different translations of that poem.

There is such a great number of different theories on translation that there is no point to start presenting all of them here. Instead we might look at what has been considered important in the field of translation at various times. Vehmas-Lehto (1999:26-30) has listed three different approaches that have been stressed throughout the history of translation. Firstly, in the ancient times and later in the 16th century there was quite a liberal approach towards translating, where the translator was able to adapt the text freely. Secondly, a popular approach throughout time has been to try and preserve the original text as well as possible in the process of translating. The Bible for example has mostly been translated this way. Thirdly, there is an approach where the use of language is quite free, while the aim is to preserve the content of the original text as well as possible. Currently the third approach is the most common to be used, since the other two can have limitations. The adaptation of a text when translating must be justified and the translator should always respect the original text (Vehmas-Lehto 1999:26). On the other hand, when one translates something directly and tries to preserve everything from the original text, the translation process will often take a great amount of time and the end result will not come across as very fluent, if even understandable in some cases. In conclusion, using language freely while still trying to preserve the content is the most respected way to translate texts.

The modern translator is most likely to have freedom in the linguistic choices he or she makes when translating a text, but cultural aspects can complicate the translation process. As Hatim and Mason's definition of translation revealed above, the boundaries we face when translating are not only linguistic, but also cultural. To a certain extent, translations always get stuck between two languages, but also two cultures (Vehmas-Lehto 2011:29). As the text or speech that is translated is written by a person who writes and speaks a different language, that person most likely comes from a different culture and there might be some cultural aspects in their text/speech that the translator should consider. When translating, one should be aware of both their own culture and the different cultures around them (Teva 2002:33) in order to produce successful translations.

## **2.2 Comparing translations**

As was mentioned above, two translations are never the same. Vertanen (2002: 96) points out that each translator has a personal strategy on how they approach the text that needs to be translated. The quality of the translated product depends on the translator and issues such as what their point of view on the meaning of the text is and what they consider to be important. Previous experiences on translations may also have an effect. If one asks for a translation on a piece of text from two translators, the result is never exactly the same (Vertanen 2002: 67). This is true, no matter what the

translated text is, whether it is literature or a piece of audio visual translation such as subtitling in TV programmes. I shall now present a previous study that I found particularly interesting from the point of view of comparing two translations in the audio visual field.

A pilot experiment was done in the field of audio visual translation by LETRA (Laboratory for experimentation in translation) that compared professional subtitlers against translation students (Pagano et al. 2011:133-160). Three professional translators, who had an average of ten years' experience on the field, and three translations students who had no previous experience of professional translation translated a Canadian film "The Handmaid's tale" from English to Portuguese and were compared in different aspects: the time they spent translating the text, reading speed, spotting and condensation. In addition, different linguistic choices they made were analysed. The translators were asked to explain the choices they had made when translating different sections. It can be seen from the experiment that it was very rare for two translations to look the same, even when they had almost the same content. The experiment was not without errors and both professional and translation students failed to translate some sections or made inappropriate translations due to the lack of awareness and poor strategies of information research (Pagano et al. 2011:153). There was no excessive gap between the success of translation students and professional translators, but a gap between individuals was evident. This type of experiment can show us the variation between different translators and give us insight on different translation strategies and how much the general knowledge that the translator has affects the ability to create a successful translation.

### **2.3 Word play and lexical relations**

One definition of word play is that it "involves making jokes by using the meanings of words in an amusing or clever way" (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English dictionary 2006). In other words, word play can be quite a broad concept and includes all types of language manipulation that intends to create amusement, for example puns, spoonerisms, even idioms. Word play can create a challenging task for translators, since it rarely works the same way when we move from one language to another. In addition to linguistic boundaries, geographical, diachronic, sociocultural and personal qualities can also have an effect on what a person finds to be funny (Chiaro 1996:5). Related to sociocultural qualities are speech communities for example. Speech communities do not only refer to people who speak a different language, but moreover people who share a language and come from different backgrounds. Until we are a part of a certain speech community, it can be

impossible to detect different language games that are being used (Farb 1974:19). Accordingly, we are unable to find unfamiliar language games humorous.

Translating word play is certainly not an easy task. Chiaro (1996:77-99), for example, has studied the translation of word play between different languages and cultures. She gives some interesting examples on different instances of translating word play and what difficulties one can have when trying to carry out this troublesome task. Chiaro emphasizes that word play is culture bound and therefore highly challenging to translate from one language to another. Therefore, it is often extremely difficult, if not impossible, to preserve the original meaning of jokes that are created by the use of word play. Bassnett (2002:30) points out that if idioms are translated directly, the outcome can be difficult to understand or in the worst case makes absolutely no sense to the reader. She suggests that the best way to try and preserve the meaning is to find a similar idiom in the target language. Although Bassnett's focus is on idioms, the same rules also apply to translating other types of word play. When the point of word play is to amuse, it is not advisable to translate puns directly, as it leads to the loss of the comic effect and possibly confusion from the point of view of the reader. However, creating a similar word play in the target language can be a difficult task and requires some inventiveness from the translator. The translator needs to analyse the text and, in addition to understanding the content, think about the most important points that should come across in the translation (Vehmas-Lehto 1999:17). In word play, the most important point is usually to preserve the comic effect, so the translator has to find a joke that he or she thinks would get the viewer to laugh. Thus, among other qualities a translator should possess a sense of humour.

As was mentioned, word play can be a broad concept. In sitcoms, however, we can often detect that lexical relations play a significant role in the linguistic games that are presented to us. Lexicology refers to the words used in a specific language and it resorts to morphology, which studies the forms of words, and semantics, which looks at the meaning of words (Jackson and Amvela 2007:2). Some lexical relations that can be used in advantage in word play are presented below.

**Homophony.** Homophones refer to words that have the same pronunciation, but are spelt differently (Jackson and Amvela 2007:27). Examples include words like *pear* and *pair* or *write* and *right*. Homophones are quite common in English compared to other languages (Alm-Arvius 1998:61)

**Homonymy.** The term homonymy is used when “a single phonological form possesses unrelated meanings” (Riemer 2010:61). In other words, homonymy refers to words that do not share any meaning, but are expressed using the same form. Homonyms do not necessarily differ in spelling, since



they are often not only pronounced, but also written the same way. A common example of homonymy is the word *bank*, which refers to both the financial institution as well as the edge of a river.

**Minimal pairs.** Relating to morphology there is the concept of minimal pairs, which refer to words that share the same form, but have contrast in one phoneme that occurs in the same position (Yule 2007:46). Minimal pairs include word pairs like *tape* and *tale* or *heat* and *heel*.

The terms above are later included in the categories of the present study, in addition to double meanings and the aspect of culture that are looked at in the results section.

## **2.4 Audio visual translation: Subtitling**

Audio visual translation is a diverse field of study that includes translating all kinds of materials that contain sounds and images. It includes for example, dubbing, subtitling and translating computer games (Oittinen and Tuominen 2007: 11). Here, the focus is on subtitling TV programmes and the strategies translators have used to try and preserve the original lines onto screen. This brings us to another term, which is screen translation. It refers specifically to the study of translating text on screen. Screen translation is a very common way of translating films and TV series in Finland. In fact, Vertanen (2002:131) states that around eighty per cent of the Finnish YLE network's TV programmes are translated on screen and with other channels, such as MTV3 the percentage is even greater. Nevertheless, the work of a screen translator can be difficult, just like all other forms of translation. In fact, it can be especially challenging at times, as there are many limitations that come with it.

When we laugh at the mistakes the translator has made while watching our favourite TV shows, few of us know about the limitations that can affect the quality of screen translation. Vertanen (2002:133-134) lists these different limitations that the translator needs to consider. Firstly, the translator can put text on two lines at a time and one can fit 30-32 spaces on each line. In addition, the two lines of text should be shown on screen for approximately five seconds at a time. Hatim and Mason (1997:79) add that the subtitles should also match the image that is visible on screen. All these rules limit the possibilities of translating the lines in their full meaning. Accordingly, the translator needs to keep the lines short to allow the viewer time to both read the line and look at the image (Kerkkä 2011:188). Of course, the limitations are there for a reason. Kerkkä points out that it is important that the viewer understands the translated line by reading it once, since one does not have a chance to go back and check the line. Then again, if the viewer did have that chance, this would most likely ruin the whole watching experience. The work of a subtitler is not simple, since

reading subtitles ought to be automatized, meaning that the viewer should not focus too much on the text, but also be aware of the images and sound.

As Gambier (2007:87) points out, the number of Master's theses in Finland relating to the subject of studying audio visual translation is growing and the focus seems to be on specific problems such as humour and word play, because of the challenges they bring to the translation process. Different comedy series such as *Friends*, *Frasier* and *Sex and the city* have been looked at from the aspect of linguistic play. Screen translation combined with word play can be a very interesting area of study, since by looking at different TV shows or films and finding a new perspective always seems to bring something new for us to analyse. Nieminen (2007), for example, has written a Master's thesis "*Sgt. Pompous and the Fancy Pants Club Band*": comparing and contrasting the translations of verbal humor in screen translations of *Shrek*, which compares Finnish subtitles with the dubbed version of the animated film *Shrek*. Nieminen's thesis is especially interesting, since the study has looked at two different ways of screen translation: dubbing and subtitling. Choosing a specific point of view, like Nieminen, when conducting a study in the audio visual field provides the opportunity to bring something new to the field.

### **3 DETECTING WORD PLAY AND TRANSLATION STRATEGIES**

In this section, I will firstly present the research questions of my study and discuss the data that was used. The reasons for choosing the particular TV series are then discussed. Secondly, the methods that were used when gathering the actual data are explained.

#### **3.1 Research questions and data**

My aim with the present study was to focus on translating word play, because as Chiaro (1996:77) states "Jokes travel [...] badly" and translating an English joke into another language is not an easy task for anyone. I chose to conduct a comparative study between two different translations of the subtitles in the TV series *How I met your mother*. I thought a comparative study could be interesting, because of the variation between different translators and the translation strategies they use. Thus, I decided to compare the official subtitles that I could find on the DVD versions of the show with subtitles that were done by amateur translators found on the internet. The quality of translations done merely by professional translators varies (Vehmas-Lehto 1999:15), so the present study was thought to provide interesting results. The research questions for the study were:

- 1) What different translation strategies have been used to translate word play in the TV series *How I met your mother*?
- 2) How do the translations of word play of amateur translators and professionals differ?

The show that was chosen for the current study is an American sitcom, where the main character Ted is telling his daughter and son the story of how he met their mother. The show is about the 30-year old architect Ted, trying to find the woman of his dreams in New York City. He has the help of his four best friends, which include Marshall and Lily, a couple he has known since college; Barney, a bachelor known for always wearing a suit and knowing his way with women; and Robin, a TV reporter who Ted has romantic feelings for throughout the show. The sitcom is known for its witty word play, which can be detected in most of the episodes. As there is such a great amount of word play, I thought that the show would be ideal for the present study. Another reason for choosing this series was that the data was easily accessible, since I had access to the DVD version of the show including Finnish subtitles and transcripts of the amateur translations were available on the internet.

### **3.2 Methods**

I started my data collection by watching the first season of the show on DVD with Finnish subtitles, translated by Miia Mattila. There were 22 episodes and the duration of one episode was approximately 20 minutes. As I watched the show, I wrote down all the examples of word play I could detect with their given translations. I also marked down the time when an example of word play occurred, so I could easily go back to look at the different examples if necessary.

After I had looked at the DVD subtitles done by a professional translator, I started looking at the amateur versions of the Finnish subtitles on the same episodes. I found the subtitles from the Database of Movie Dialogues (29 Mar 2012), which is a site that provides a database of subtitles for different films and television series. The subtitles found on this website are taken from DivX Finland (2003), which is a site where anyone interested in screen translation can register and start translating different films and TV shows. The best translations are picked out, proofreading is done by more experienced translators and the end product is put on the site for people to download. This original site does not provide viewers with transcripts anymore, but transcripts could be found from the Database of Movie Dialogues (29 Mar 2012) by writing the name of the show, the season and the episode on the search bar. While watching the DVD version, I had to write down all the data,

but by finding transcripts of the amateur translations I could simply compare them to the word play examples I had written down while watching the show on DVD. As I compared the two translations on different examples of word play, I picked out the most interesting examples I could use in my study. There was more data to be found than was expected. Thus, the examples chosen for the current study were chosen according to the differences found between the professional and amateur translations. Finally, the examples were put into separate categories to enable a thorough analysis.

#### **4 PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR TRANSLATIONS**

In my analysis I have focused on lexical relations. In addition, the analysis includes a section on culture related jokes that seemed to lose their meaning when translated. Since the show *How I met your mother* had a large variety of examples on different lexical relations, I chose the ones that I found most interesting to analyse from the perspective of comparative analysis between a DVD translation and an amateur translation. I will now present ten examples under the categories of homophony, homonymy, minimal pairs, double meanings and culture.

##### **4.1 Homophony**

The word homophone refers to a lexical relation where two words sound the same, although they are spelt differently. For example the words *whine* and *wine* are homophones. When gathering data, homophones as a tool for word play seemed to be extremely common and the translation of homophones was a challenge both for professional and amateur translators. Three examples of homophony are presented below.

##### **Example 1 (S01E03)**

The word *Legendary* is repeatedly heard on the show by Barney, usually in the form ‘*Legen - Wait for it! – dary*’. He uses the word to express excitement over something. In this episode, Ted and Barney are being questioned by the police, because of their weird behaviour at the airport. They are now able to leave the questioning room, but Barney gets invited for drinks by the female officer while Ted is on the phone.

Original lines	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<p><b>Barney:</b> We're going to Sachas.  <b>Ted:</b> Who the hell is Sacha?  <b>Barney:</b> Sacha (pointing at the female officer who is waving back). She's having friends over for drinks at her house. It's gonna be legen- wait for it - and I hope you're not lactose-intolerant because the next part of the word is- dary!</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Menemme Sachan luo.  <b>Ted:</b> Kuka hän on?  <b>Barney:</b> Sacha! Hän on kutsunut kavereita drinkeille kotiinsa. Siitä tulee legen - ja toinen osa sanaa on - daarista!</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Menemme Sashalle.  <b>Ted:</b> Kuka hemmetti on Sasha?  <b>Barney:</b> Sasha. Hänellä on kotona ystäviä drinkillä. Siitä tulee legen... - odota hieman - Toivottavasti et ole maitoallergikko, koska sana päättyy maitotuotteeseen. Legendaarista.</p>

As Barney cuts the word *legendary* in half, the last part of the word *-dary* becomes a homonym with the word *dairy*. Barney creates a joke based on this homonym, referring to people who are lactose-intolerant, in the middle of the word. In the DVD translation the joke is ignored and the line merely translated '*Legen - and the second part of the word is - dary!*' In the amateur translation the word play is fully translated, but the comic effect is lost, because there is no similar homonym in the Finnish language. In addition, the translation becomes awkward and makes no sense to the viewer. The strategies used here are ignoring the translation and direct translation.

### Example 2 (S01E05)

Robin and Lily are outside a nightclub and they are unable to get in. Robin had her name on the guest list before and was able to get all her friends past the queue, but she left the club to take a phone call and while she was talking on the phone the security officer changed. The new security officer does not let her past the queue and Robin is now sitting on the sidewalk with Lily, who just arrived.

Original lines	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<p><b>Robin:</b> I get recognised one time and I start thinking I'm Julia Roberts. I'm no VIP. I'm not even an IP. I'm just a lonely little P, sitting out here in the gutter.  <b>Lily:</b> You know something. I'd take a P in the gutter over Julia Roberts any time.</p>	<p><b>Robin:</b> Minut tunnistettiin kerran ja kuvittelin olevani Julia Roberts. En ole VIP, en edes IP. Olen vain tavallinen P, joka istuu katuojassa.  <b>Lily:</b> Tiedätkö mitä? Pidän enemmän P:stä katuojassa kuin Julia Robertsista.</p>	<p><b>Robin:</b> Kerrankin minut tunnistetaan, ja alan ajatella olevani Julia Roberts. En minä ole VIP. En ole edes IP. Olen vain pahainen pieni papu ojan pohjalla.  <b>Lily:</b> Tiedätkö mitä? Ottaisin pavun ojasta Julia Robertsin sijasta koska tahansa.</p>

The joke in this scene is based on the homophony of the letter *P* and the word *pee*. Also, in the expression *take a pee in the gutter* the word *take* has a whole different meaning. It changes the meaning from taking something concretely to performing an action - in this case urinating. In the DVD translation the joke has lost its meaning, since the line has been translated directly without trying to reserve the pun and therefore makes no sense to the viewer. In the amateur translation *Lonely little P* is translated to *little bean*, so Lily's line goes '*I'd take a bean in the gutter over Julia*

*Roberts any time.* The line is understandable, but the pun is still lost and the humoristic effect is not as great as in the original version. Besides, in both translations the viewer should understand that the abbreviation *VIP* refers to *very important person*, in order to understand the line. Overall, it seems like an impossible task to translate this joke entirely. Direct translation confuses the viewer and using the word *bean* is only a slightly better strategy.

### Example 3 (S01E09)

Barney has just proved to Ted that he could get a girl's phone number by using the pick-up line '*Daddy's home*' and is now telling Ted that he thinks too much instead of taking action. Barney suggests that Ted should learn for him.

Original lines	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<p><b>Barney:</b> Ted, your problem is all you do is think, think, think. I'm teaching you how to do, do, do!</p> <p><b>Marshall:</b> Doo-doo, hah! (laughs)</p> <p><b>Barney:</b> Totally. (laughs)</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Sinä vain ajattelet. Minä opettelen toimimaan.</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Ted, mietit aivan liikaa. Opetan sinulle, kuinka toimitaan.</p>

Both in the DVD and amateur translations, the joke made here is ignored and has not been translated at all. Marshall points out the homonym between the words *do* and *doo(-doo)* 'feces', and laughs at Barney's choice of words. The joke is a very short one and is not referred to later, which probably made both translators choose not to translate the joke. The translation would have required the translator to find a similar homophone in the Finnish language and there is none to be found. In this case the strategy to ignore the joke seemed natural for both translators.

## 4.2 Homonymy

Homonyms are words that share the same pronunciation and spelling, but differ in meaning. Homonyms were not as common as homophones when gathering data, but the lexical relation of homonymy appears to be equally difficult to translate as can be seen from the following example.

### Example 4 (S01E06)

Barney is at a Halloween party dressed as the devil and is trying to pick up girls. He is talking to a girl and offers to make her a drink.

Original lines	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<p><b>Girl:</b> You certainly are a charming devil.</p> <p><b>Barney:</b> I'm also a horny devil (points at his horns).</p>	<p><b>Girl:</b> Oletkin hurmaava paholainen.</p> <p><b>Barney:</b> Minulla on myös sarvet, joilla tökkiä.</p>	<p><b>Girl:</b> Olet oikea hurmaava pirulainen.</p> <p><b>Barney:</b> Olen myös isosarvinen.</p>

The homonym *horny* is used in this line to create amusement as it relates to both Barney's Halloween costume and his sexual frustration. In the translations this does not come across. In the DVD translation the translation means '*I also have horns that I can poke with.*' and in the amateur version '*I also have big horns.*' In both cases the translator has tried to create a comic effect by creating a similar joke, but with poor results.

### 4.3 Minimal pairs

The term minimal pair refers to words that have the same form, but differ in one phonological element. The words *pin* and *bin* for example are a minimal pair. In the series that was studied, minimal pairs were often used to create comic effect and proved to be difficult to translate. Two examples are presented below.

#### Example 5 (S01E04)

Previously in this episode Barney has challenged Robin to say the word *nipple* on television and promised to pay her if she does. The first line here is from Robin's television report and the following one is when Barney sees Robin after the incident.

Original lines	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<p><b>Robin:</b> So, next time you're passing city hall, make sure and stop by New York's oldest hot dog cart. Today a delicious hot dog will cost you 2.50, but back when the stand first opened in 1955, you could get one for only a nipple.</p> <p>...</p>	<p><b>Robin:</b> Kun kuljette kaupungintalon ohi, muistakaa NY:n vanhin nakkikioski. Nykyään nakkisämpylä maksaa 2,50, mutta kioskin auetessa vuonna 1955 se maksoi vain nännin.</p> <p>...</p>	<p><b>Robin:</b> Ensi kerran, kun tulette kaupungintalolle, varmistakaa, että pysähdytte New Yorkin vanhimmalle hodari-kojulle. Nykyään herkullinen hot dog maksaa 2,50 dollaria, mutta kun koju avattiin vuonna 1955, sellaisen sai pelkällä nännillä.</p> <p>...</p>
<p><b>Barney:</b> There she is. Hey, is it cold in here? Cause I can kind of see Robin's nickels.</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Siinä hän on. Onko täällä kylmä? Näen Robinin pennit.</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Onko täällä kylmä? Näyttäisi siltä, että näen Robinin viisisenttiset.</p>

In these scenes the word play is based on the minimal pair between the words *nipple* and *nickle*. In the DVD translation, there is a similar word play between the Finnish words 'nänni' *nipple* and 'penni' *penny*, although it is not as obvious as in the original line. In the amateur translation there is no attempt to preserve the word play, so the humoristic effect is lost altogether. Overall, the strategy used in the DVD translation works better than the direct translation in the amateur version.

### Example 6 (S01E09)

This example is from the same episode as example 3. Ted has taken Barney's advice and is taking action instead of thinking too much about what he is doing. Earlier Ted was so drunk that he was put to bed by Marshall and Lily, but now he has gotten up and returned to the local bar, MacLaren's. Barney is there and is excited to see him, thinking they could pick up some girls. He says the following to Ted:

Original line	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<b>Barney:</b> Do you know what time it is? It's do a clock. Bring it!	<b>Barney:</b> Kello on puoli pano.	<b>Barney:</b> Tiedätkö, mitä kello on? Aika panna toimeksi. Lähdetäänpä radalle.

Here the the words *two* and *do* create a minimal pair. By saying *do a clock*, Barney is referring to picking up girls at the bar. In the DVD translation of this line, the translator has tried to preserve the joke and the translation goes somewhat '*It's half past fuck.*' referring to the guys getting sex later that night, which is usually Barney's agenda when picking up girls. In the amateur translation, the line translates roughly as follows '*Do you know what time it is? It's time to take action. Let's go!*'. There is a slight word play as the Finnish question 'Tiedätkö mitä kello on?' refers to actual time (2am for example) and the answer reveals a different meaning. In other words, both translations have preserved some of the comic effect in their own way.

### 4.4 Double meanings

The category of double meanings was created for examples that were not only about one word that affected the meaning, but a saying that could be understood in two different ways. The translations of double meanings are challenging to translate and like the categories above, require the translator to create a similar joke to preserve the comic effect. Two examples of double meanings are presented below.

### Example 7 (S01E03)

Barney has taken Ted to the airport, saying that he needs to '*pick someone up*'.

Original lines	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<b>Ted:</b> Why do you have those suitcases and who are we picking up? <b>Barney:</b> I don't know. Maybe her. Or her... <b>Ted:</b> Wait, so when you said you were gonna pick someone up at the airport, you meant you were going to pick someone up at the airport?	<b>Ted:</b> Kenet me haemme? <b>Barney:</b> Ehkä hänet. Tai hänet... <b>Ted:</b> Tarkoitit siis, että tulet hakemaan jonkun, kenet tahansa?	<b>Ted:</b> Miksi sinulla on matkalaukut mukanasi, ja ketä olemme hakemassa? <b>Barney:</b> En tiedä. Ehkä hänet tai hänet. <b>Ted:</b> Hetkinen. Kun sanoit hakevasi jonkun lentokentältä, tarkoitit iskevəsi jonkun lentokentältä?



The double meaning of *pick someone up* in the original line has a humoristic effect as Ted thought they were meeting someone at the airport and giving them a ride home, Barney meant that they would go to the airport to hit on girls. In Finnish there is no such double meaning, consequently in the DVD translation the translation is '*So you meant that you were going to pick someone up, anyone?*' and the amateur translator has merely translated the line as it is. Both fail to preserve the word play, but the humoristic effect is perhaps greater in the DVD version.

### Example 8 (S01E12)

Ted is at Robin's house. He has come to take her to a wedding. Ted compliments Robin's outfit and Robin returns the compliment by referring to Ted's suit.

Original lines	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<p><b>Robin:</b> Look who else brought it.  <b>Ted:</b> Oh yeah, thought about leaving it at home, but I figured - I don't wanna get there and realise I need it and have to go all the way back to get it. So yeah, I brought it.</p>	<p><b>Robin:</b> Sinullakin on ykköset.  <b>Ted:</b> Ajattelin jotakin muuta numeroa, mutta en halua ottaa riskiä, joten panin ykköset.</p>	<p><b>Robin:</b> Sinäkin hoidit homman.  <b>Ted:</b> Kyllä. Ajattelin jättää sen kotiin, mutta ajattelin, etten halua mennä sinne tajutakseni, että tarvitsen sitä, ja joutuen siten palaamaan takaisin hakemaan sen. Siispä hoidin homman.</p>

By saying '*Look who else brought it.*' Robin is referring to Ted wearing a suit and looking smart. Ted turns the line into a joke by talking about concretely bringing something with him. The joke is thereby based on the double meaning of *brought it*. In the DVD translation there is an effort to preserve the word play by using the double meaning of the word *ykköset* in Finnish, which refers to both wearing a formal outfit and the number one. In Robin's line the word refers to Ted's outfit, but Ted replies '*I was thinking of another number, but I didn't want to risk it, so I put on "ykköset".*' Although the translation is slightly clumsy, it is the best example here to present the creativeness translators should use. Creativeness is the best, but moreover the most difficult strategy in translating word play. The amateur translation of the same lines show us 'the easy way out' by using direct translation, which leads to the loss of the comic effect and even confusion.

### 4.5 Culture related word play

As was noted in the theory section of the current study, a challenge in all areas of translation is the aspect of culture. In *How I met you mother*, there seemed to be both culture and word play mixed together. The translator is thereby faced with not one, but two difficult aspects of translation. Two examples on the translation of culture related word play were analysed.

### Example 9 (S01E06)

It is Halloween and Ted is dressed as a hanging chad, a type of ballot. Robin enters the room and reacts to Ted's costume.

Original line	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<b>Robin:</b> Hey Chad, how's it hanging? <b>Ted:</b> Hey, word play. Funny.	<b>Robin:</b> Vaadin tarkistuslaskentaa. <b>Ted:</b> Hauskaa.	<b>Robin:</b> Hei Chad, kuinka roikkuu? <b>Ted:</b> Sanaleikkiä. Hauskaa.

USLegal definitions (2012) gives the following explanation to the term *hanging chad*:

Hanging Chad is a chad that is not completely detached from the ballot. A chad is a tiny bit of paper that is punched from a ballot using a punch-type mechanical voting machine. When there is a hanging chad, that vote may not be counted correctly. Chad was made infamous in the highly contentious 2000 United States presidential election where many of Florida votes used votomatic punched card ballots.

The above definition of a hanging chad is most likely unknown to people who are not familiar with the 2000 United States presidential election and adding word play sets quite a challenge for the translator. Earlier when Ted's costume, the hanging chad, has been a topic of conversation, the professional translator has translated the term as 'hylätty äänestyslippuke' *an abandoned ballot* and the amateur translator as 'epäkelpo äänestyslippu' *an invalid ballot*. In her line, Robin turns around the words *hanging* and *chad* into '*Chad, how's it hanging?*' changing the word *chad* into a name and using the word *hanging* to create a question '*How's it hanging?*'. The DVD translation of Robin's line preserves Robin's reference to Ted's costume, the ballot, by translating the line '*I demand a recount.*' The amateur translator has chosen to translate the line as it is and the word play is completely lost. In addition, what makes the amateur translation even more confusing to the viewer is that the line '*Hey word play. Funny.*' was translated, even when there was no attempt to preserve the actual word play. Then again, however the word play is translated, the Finnish viewer is most likely not able to understand what Ted's costume is presenting, since it refers to the United States presidential elections in 2000.

### Example 10 (S01E07)

Barney, Robin and Ted are at the bar and they are talking about dating. Barney suggests applying a lemon law, meaning laws that are used with cars in the United States, to dating.

Original line	DVD translation	Amateur translation
<p><b>Barney:</b> Last night, epiphany, I realised what the world of dating needs. A lemon law.</p> <p><b>Robin:</b> A lemon law, like for cars?</p> <p><b>Barney:</b> Exactly. From the moment that the date begins, you have five minutes to decide whether they are going to commit to an entire evening. And if you don't, it's no hard feelings, just good night, thanks for playing, see you never.</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Tiedän mitä deittailumaailma kaipaa. Sitruunalakia.</p> <p><b>Robin:</b> Niin kuin autokaupassa?</p> <p><b>Barney:</b> Päätöksen tekoon on aikaa viisi minuuttia. Jos siinä vaiheessa ei kiinnosta "Hyvästi, nähdään ei ikinä."</p>	<p><b>Barney:</b> Sain eilen älynväläyksen. Käsitin, mitä treffimaailma kaipaa? Sinkunsuojalakia.</p> <p><b>Robin:</b> Kuluttajansuojalakia, kuten autoille?</p> <p><b>Barney:</b> Täsmälleen. Siitä hetkestä, kun treffit alkavat, on viisi minuuttia aikaa päättää, sitoutuuko koko illaksi. Ja jos ei, ei kanneta kaunaa, vain "hyvää yötä, oli mukava tavata, ei nähdä koskaan".</p>

A lemon law is a law in the United States "offering car buyers relief (as by repair, replacement, or refund) for defects detected during a specific period after purchase" (Merriam Webster online dictionary, key word *lemon law*). In the DVD version the lines have been directly translated into Finnish and the humoristic effect is lost. In the amateur version there is an attempt to preserve the original meaning by talking about consumer protection policy. Then again, it is not the same as lemon law and for this reason the viewer merely gets confused by the translation.

## 5 DISCUSSION

In all of the examples above, the translators seem to have struggled to find an appropriate translation for different types of word play. However, three types of strategies seem to arise from the translations. These are: ignoring the translation of word play, translating it directly and finding a similar joke in the target language. First, I will briefly explain what I mean by each of these categories and then move on to look at any general differences that arose between the two translations that were looked at in the present study.

Ignoring word play completely and leaving it without a translation seems to be the option when the translator is unable to create a similar joke that would work in the specific scene. As Vehmas-Lehto (1999:100) says, at times translations can require an explanation that would be difficult to provide and would take up too much space. Therefore, the easiest option is to leave them out. In the DVD translation of example 1 the joke in Barney's line is not translated, since there is no equivalent word play in Finnish and the word *Legendary* is Barney's catch phrase, which should be translated. The viewer will not understand the joke, but the choice is better compared to the amateur translation, where the viewer merely gets confused by the translation. Another example where the translation is left out is example 3. Both translators have chosen to ignore the joke that was made.

Not translating the jokes at all should be avoided, but as was mentioned, we can see a worse option in the amateur translation in example 1. Accordingly, the most awkward translations seem to be the ones that translate word play directly, which can lead to the loss of the comic effect and most likely confuse the viewer. Of the examples above, the most confusing translation for the viewer might be the DVD translation in example 2. The word play that is presented through the homonym *pee* and the letter *P* does not come across in any way and, in addition, the abbreviation *VIP* can create confusion if the meaning is not clear. The amateur translation in example 9 also leaves the viewer confused. The line *Hey Chad, how's it hanging?* makes no sense when translated directly into Finnish.

In contrast, the translation is usually most effective when the translator has used creativity to create a new similar joke, since this way the joke is portrayed to the viewer, at least to some extent. Replacing a 'difficult' joke with another joke in the target language is a preferred approach when translating films (Chiaro 199:22) or in this case, a television series. Probably the most inventive data in the present study can be seen in the DVD translation of example 8, where the double meaning of *bring it* has been replaced with a Finnish word play by using the word 'ykköset'. The translator has been able to create a similar joke that works, does not take too much space on the screen and the comic effect of word play is preserved. Most of the translations have been able to preserve the comic effect to some extent, but usually the line does not work as well as in the source language. Creating an equivalent linguistic game, which would work as well as the original, requires much thought and as translators usually do not have an excessive amount of time to use on one translation, all the examples of word play cannot be as successful as the one presented.

All the translation strategies above could be seen both in the DVD translations as well as the amateur translations, which shows us that the translations done by professionals are not necessarily better than the ones done by people who have no professional experience in screen translation. However, amateur translators have more freedom when translating, which can affect the outcome of the translation. In the amateur translations there are several people who conduct the translation of one episode and another person to do the proofreading. Accordingly, the translation process of one episode can include up to seven people. Another advantage of amateur translators is that they do not have the same limitations as professional translators. Amateur translators break the rules of screen translation conventions by using more space for their subtitles, which allows them to provide more detailed translations. Thus, the amateur translators have a better chance to succeed with their translations in terms of conventions and the quantity of translators. On the other hand, the

professional translator has an education and more experience on the field to help him or her with the translation. In conclusion, both translators made some poor choices while translating word play, but in some examples also showed inventiveness. Therefore, there seems to be no significant difference between the successfulness of the professional and amateur translations.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

The aim of the present study was to compare how word play is treated by different translators, a professional translator and amateur translators. Due to different linguistic elements and cultural factors, the translation of word play is especially difficult and in most of the examples that were introduced in the present study the translation failed to preserve the linguistic game. However, efforts to preserve the joke could be seen, although some of the comic effect always seemed to be lost in the translations. In addition to the difficulty of translating word play, the limitations of screen translation most likely played a part in the challenge, at least in the professional translation.

When comparing the two translations, no significant differences between the professional and the amateur translators could be detected. Both the professional and the amateur translations succeeded and failed in their translations of different examples of word play. Different strategies were used in the translation process, including ignoring the joke, direct translation and the attempt to preserve the linguistic game. The latter strategy was found to be the most effective way as ignoring the joke and direct translation led to the loss of the comic effect and could sometimes even confuse the viewer.

The current study employed several points of view as it looked at translation of word play and compared two different translations. However, there was perhaps too much to cover in such a brief thesis. Focusing more on the comparison of two translations by looking at only a few episodes of a series or a film could be an interesting approach. The difficulties of translation do not appear only in the area of linguistic play and humour. Surely by choosing appropriate data, examples of difficulties of translating cultural references for example, could be a topic of its own.

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