The Subtextual Significances of Pragmatic Equivalence in Translating Humor

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Abstract

This article examines the importance of pragmatic equivalence in translating humor, a crucial yet often challenging aspect due to humor's deep reliance on cultural context, implicature, and audience interpretation. Pragmatic equivalence emphasizes the conveyance of implicit meaning through communication principles such as those proposed by Grice, where coherence takes precedence over mere lexical and grammatical cohesion. In humor translation, coherence refers to the interconnectedness of meaning based on shared context and knowledge between the author and the audience, rather than simply the structure of sentences. However, humor is inherently ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, making its meaning not always directly transferable. A single mistranslated element can alter the entire comedic effect, as humor is often highly culture-specific. In this case, the translator's role extends beyond language transfer to bridging the knowledge gap that the target audience might have, sometimes at the cost of the humor's spontaneity. This challenge creates a dilemma between preserving natural comedic effect and delivering accurate meaning. As a result, humor translation often leans toward either overly literal or overly liberal approaches, each with the risk of losing essential nuance. Therefore, pragmatic equivalence involves more than just finding corresponding meanings; it also requires sensitivity to the social and cultural contexts that shape audience responses. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the unique complexity of humor translation, making it a valuable contribution to the fields of literary studies, linguistics, and translation studies.

Keywords: Coherence; Humor; Implicature; Translation.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji pentingnya kesetaraan pragmatik dalam menerjemahkan humor, sebuah aspek yang krusial namun sering kali menantang karena humor sangat bergantung pada konteks budaya, implikatur, dan interpretasi audiens. Kesetaraan pragmatik menekankan penyampaian makna implisit melalui prinsip-prinsip komunikasi seperti yang dikemukakan oleh Grice, di mana koherensi menjadi lebih penting daripada sekadar kohesi leksikal dan gramatikal. Dalam penerjemahan humor, koherensi menciptakan keterhubungan makna berdasarkan konteks dan pengetahuan bersama antara pengarang

dan audiens, bukan hanya pada struktur kalimat. Namun demikian, humor bersifat ambigu dan terbuka terhadap banyak kemungkinan penafsiran, sehingga makna tidak selalu dapat ditransfer secara langsung. Kesalahan menerjemahkan satu unsur saja dapat mengubah efek komedi secara keseluruhan karena humor sering kali sangat kultural. Penerjemah, dalam hal ini, tidak hanya bertugas mengalihkan bahasa, tetapi juga harus mengisi celah pengetahuan yang mungkin dimiliki audiens target, kadang-kadang dengan mengorbankan spontanitas humor itu sendiri. Tantangan ini menciptakan dilema antara menjaga efek lucu yang alami dengan penyampaian makna yang akurat. Akibatnya, penerjemahan humor sering kali jatuh pada pendekatan yang terlalu literal atau terlalu bebas, masing-masing dengan risiko kehilangan nuansa penting. Oleh karena itu, kesetaraan pragmatik bukan hanya soal padanan makna, melainkan juga mempertimbangkan konteks sosial dan budaya dalam menciptakan respons yang sepadan. Kebaruan kajian ini terletak pada sorotannya terhadap kompleksitas unik dalam menerjemahkan humor, menjadikannya kontribusi penting dalam ranah kajian sastra, linguistik, dan studi terjemahan.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Humor; Implikatur; Koherensi; Penerjemahan.*

INTRODUCTION

Matter of translation is not merely about concepts, but also contexts. The existence of an audience is crucial in translating texts. The main idea of translation is to make others understand about the texts.[1] If it does not consider the target as the main purpose, then it will lose its meaning though it may be grammatically correct. It is included in pragmatics as one idea in study of literature that underlines the matter of the audience. The audience is a reflection of social relations in which each individual interprets and gives meanings to everyday life. The main idea of that stream is to put thinking in practical ways. In this sense, being practical is not the opposite of being abstract, but considering the relations between linguistic forms and the users of them. Pragmatics takes subtextual study of gestures, intentions, and discourse as its main topics. It is not in static forms, but in flexible ideas in which it relates to what people think of it.[2] The main idea of its equivalence is about the contexts that are not plainly involved in matters of structures.

Translating humor could be really challenging since it in many times ignores matters of grammatical correctness. Pragmatic problems can arise when source and target languages have different practical ways of thinking or basic truths or rules (principles).[3] This could be an example of what is really polite in one circle of a group, but also it is impolite to another circle of group as different kinds of humor. The main idea is people smile and even laugh

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[1] Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[2] Livia Wulandari et al., "The Semiotic Analysis Meaning of Love in Last Night on Earth by Green Day," *Jurnal Adijaya Multidisplin* 1, no. 1 (2023): 248–255, https://e-journal.naureendigition.com/index.php/jam/article/view/229.
[3] Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*.

when reading or listening about it. It does not matter if humor is not semantically correct since relating to the context of the audience is the main purpose of it.

To address these challenges, pragmatic equivalence becomes crucial. This approach considers the contextual meaning of humor, ensuring that the translated text conveys the intended humor effectively. By focusing on pragmatic equivalence, translators can better capture the inferred meanings in humor, leading to a more accurate and culturally sensitive translation.[4] Moreover, translating humor, for example from Bahasa to English and vice versa, needs to be understood through matters of pragmatic equivalence. By considering the best idea of one meaning to another contextually, the homogenous condition between them could be realized.

Then, the research question for this paper is how may pragmatic equivalence in translating humor contribute to better pragmatic understanding to the audience? By emphasizing on matters of pragmatics, inferred meanings in humor could be attained better by widened audience. Pragmatic equivalence indicates meanings as matter of language use in its context-dependent beyond the words of the texts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to analyze the concept of pragmatic equivalence in humor translation. The central focus of this analysis lies in the significance of cultural meanings embedded within the source text and how these meanings are effectively transformed into the target text.[5] Given that humor is a highly contextual form of communication, rich in cultural references, translators are challenged to preserve the humorous effect in a way that remains acceptable and comprehensible to the target audience without losing the core message.

Data collection is conducted through documentation techniques, utilizing both online and offline sources such as academic books and scholarly journals relevant to translation studies and cultural studies. This documentation process includes identifying concrete examples of humor translation, which are then analyzed to reveal recurring patterns, contextual relevance, and the strategies applied in the translation process.[6] The data analysis

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[4] Georgina Heydon dan Sajjad Kianbakht, "Applying Cultural Linguistics to Translation Studies: A New Model for Humour Translation," *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* 8, no. 3 (2020): 1–11, https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJCLTS/article/view/6311.

[5] John Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Edisi 4. (Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE Publications, 2014).

[6] Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018).

steps involve gathering references, critically reading the selected materials, comparing them with related issues, quoting relevant information into the paper, and systematically citing the sources in the reference list.

Content analysis is employed as the primary technique for interpreting the data. Through this method, the study seeks to elaborate on concepts such as Grice's conversational maxims and other pragmatic principles that play a role in humor translation.[7] This analysis aims to uncover how translators manage shifts in meaning and implicature within the texts, as well as how cultural and social values influence the reinterpretation of humor in the target language. Thus, the study is expected to offer a theoretical contribution to the field of translation studies, particularly in the areas of pragmatics and cultural transformation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Being Coherent as Making Sense to a Text

Translation in matters of pragmatic equivalence is to bring meanings to readership. Its main focus is to 'make sense' beyond the textual level of connecting sentences.[8] Textual aspects should be seen not in its literal understandings, but in its textual features. One of its features is language as cross-cultural communication. Translation should not reduce its richness of texts, but keep them intact in different languages, even in its subtextual manner. It is an expression of language and it should bring in intended equal meanings from one language to another. This process can be seen as an intermediary interaction between the writer and the audience.[9] It is situated, where the translator acts as a facilitator to ensure that the message is conveyed coherently and cohesively across languages. In other words, translation works like an interaction that is seen as intermediary between the writer and the audience.

Bringing the sense to the text is a matter of pragmatic ideas. Its purpose is clear, that is to identify and to present conceptual relations of contextual meanings. By relying on pragmatics in literary studies as a perspective, meanings are derived beyond the linguistic system from the side of the audience.[10] On this aspect, coherence is a subtextual

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[7] Lexi J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2002).

[8] Paula Rubio-Fernandez, "Overinformative Speakers Are Cooperative: Revisiting the Gricean Maxim of Quantity," *Cognitive Science A Multidisiplinary Journal* 43, no. 11 (2019): 1–21, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cogs.12797.

[9] Shushanik Paronyan, "Pragmatic Equivalence in Literary Translation," *Translation Studies: Theory and Practice* 2 (2024): 158–171, https://journals.ysu.am/index.php/transl-stud/article/view/11408.

[10] Md. Mahroof Hossain, "The Application of Grice Maxims in Conversation: A Pragmatic Study," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* 3, no. 10 (2021): 32–40, https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jeltal/article/view/2166.

understanding that should be emphasized on meaning dependencies. It is different from cohesion in which its perspective relies on lexical and grammatical dependencies. While cohesion is the relations of words and expression in a text, coherence plays wider roles in indicating a network of conceptual meanings.

Coherence in translation emphasizes virtue of meanings assumed by the audience. It is dissimilar to cohesion on its objective condition in showing automatic recognition.[11] Coherence chooses to underline subjective evaluation that could not be separated from everyday experience. Texts in coherence situations are shown as events that are having no distance to its audience. Grice's cooperative way of principles carefully studies the practical state between translators and audience. Translators are meant as communicators who cooperate with target readers by following four cooperative true statements: quantity of information, quality of truth, relevance or consistency of context, and clarity of the translation.[12]

> I bought a Ford. The car in which President Wilson rode down the Champs-Elysees was black. Black English has been widely discussed. The discussion is good, but bad.
>
> *Saya membeli Ford. Mobil yang dikendarai Presiden Wilson untuk mengitari Champs-Elysees berwarna hitam. Tema warga kulit hitam berkebangsaan Inggris telah banyak dibahas. Pembahasan itu baik, tapi sebaiknya tidak dibicarakan.*

The left example shows grammatical cohesion, as one sentence follows another with a similar theme. However, the unity is lacking because the sentences rely on subtextual presuppositions and do not form a coherent whole.

> I like black coffee. The roasted one is always better than the instant one. Some people enjoy coffee with cream, while I prefer pure black coffee. The bitter one, like life.
>
> *Saya suka kopi hitam. Biji kopi yang disangrai selalu lebih baik daripada yang instan. Beberapa orang menikmati kopi dengan krim, sementara saya lebih suka kopi hitam murni. Terutama yang pahit, seperti hidup.*

The second translation does not use complicated sentences since its main emphasis is on the coherence of meaning. It is still cohesive in relation among sentences yet the main idea is to show the unity of coffee as the main theme. From the first sentence to the last, the relations are about coffee. Even if there are other predicates that follow, the main theme is

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[11] Rahmat Wisudawanto, "Kesepadanan Pragmatik dalam Penerjemahan Satire," *Pesona: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* 7, no. 1 (2021): 38–48, https://ejournal.umpri.ac.id/index.php/pesona/article/view/1379.

[12] Hossain, "The Application of Grice Maxims in Conversation: A Pragmatic Study."

not put away at all.[13] Cohesion involves the grammatical and structural elements that unify a text, while coherence relates to the meaning and connection of ideas within it. A text may be grammatically cohesive but still lack coherence if its meaning is not aligned with or understood by the audience.

Reflecting from the examples above, a text may be cohesive in itself, but it may not be coherent to others. Cohesion correlates matter's of grammatical correctness, but coherence is beyond that matter. Coherence works through discourse that could be so specific and bounded by space and time.[14] Meanings in coherence arise from human understanding of language, not merely from grammatical structure, but from subtextual interpretation and reading experience. Therefore, a translator must consider how the audience will understand the text, rather than relying solely on their own interpretation.

Moreover, being coherent is situational and culturally relative depends on audiences. It shows matters of identities that are tightly embraced rather than merely language as potential tools for communication. In this sense, text is a cultural product that is simultaneously being consumed and produced by people as subjects. Then, the audience is considered an active subject who always interprets any implied meaning based on knowledge and experience of the world.[15]

The text is culturally processed based on the audience's deep involvement, so the success of the translation depends on understanding the meaning that connects one culture to another. Understanding the text is not about the idea of the world in general, but how the audience perceives it to be believable, consistent, and relevant.[16] The meaning of the world is diverse and influenced by cultural, relative, and subtextual contexts. For the meaning to be understood, the audience must believe the text makes sense, while translation plays a role in bringing the meaning closer analogously as part of pretense.

> While watching a movie in the theater, a man can't hear the dialogue over the chatter of the two women sitting in front of him. Unable to bear it any longer, he taps one of them on the Shoulder. "Excuse me," he says, "I can't hear." "I should hope not," one woman replies sharply. "This is a private conversation."
>
> *Saat menonton film di bioskop, seorang pria tidak dapat mendengar dialognya karena obrolan dua wanita yang duduk di depannya. Tidak tahan lagi, dia menepuk*

[13] Heydon dan Sajjad Kianbakht, "Applying Cultural Linguistics to Translation Studies: A New Model for Humour Translation."

[14] Wulandari et al., "The Semiotic Analysis Meaning of Love in Last Night on Earth by Green Day."

[15] Gafurova Gulrukh Bakhtiyorovna, "Equivalence and Pragmatic Aspects of Translation of Journalistic Texts," *European Journal of Literature and Linguistics* 23, no. 1 (2023): 24–29, https://ppublishing.org/archive/publication/572-equivalence-and-pragmatic-aspects-of-translati.

[16] Habiba Nakhli, "Pragmatic Aspects of Translation," *Journal of Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis* 1, no. 1 (2022): 30–35, https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jpds/article/view/4594.

bahu salah satu dari mereka. "Maaf," katanya, "Saya tidak bisa mendengar dialognya." "Saya harap tidak," jawab salah satu perempuan itu dengan tegas. "Ini adalah percakapan pribadi."

The text discusses a misunderstanding in communication between a man and a woman about hearing, which creates humor. The man politely asks the woman to be quiet, but she misunderstands, showing ignorance and causing a funny situation.[17] The man's request is taken as an insult or an attempt to secretly listen in, highlighting the woman's rudeness and lack of (serious thought, something to think about respect) for others.

This miscommunication is a common theme in many cultures, including Indonesian culture, where similar misunderstandings can lead to comedic situations.[18] The concept of hearing here aligns with being understood by the audience, and the humor translates well into Bahasa Indonesia. This is because the translation creates a relatable and relevant situation in the theater, making the meaning clear to Indonesian viewers.

Cewek: "Sayang tadi handphone aku jatuh dari lantai 3"
Cowok: "Terus gimana? pasti pecah ya?"
Cewek: "Enggak, untung aku hidupin mode pesawatnya, jadi dia bisa terbang"
Cowok: *mengheningkan cipta*

Girl: "Dear, my cell phone fell from the 3rd floor just now"
Boy: "So? It must be broken, mustn't it?"
Girl: "No, luckily I turned on its airplane mode, so it could fly"
Boy: *silence*

The dialogue above is common in Indonesia today, influenced by the widespread sharing of love through various media, including social media. The humor lies in the misunderstanding of "airplane mode" on phones, which is widely known and shows a cultural resemblance in interpreting the same feature differently.[19] The humor relies on the universal understanding of smartphone functions, making the dialogue easily relatable across cultures. It shows how shared experiences with smartphones create common ground for connection and laughter.

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[17] Rubio-Fernandez, "Overinformative Speakers Are Cooperative: Revisiting the Gricean Maxim of Quantity."

[18] Heydon dan Sajjad Kianbakht, "Applying Cultural Linguistics to Translation Studies: A New Model for Humour Translation."

[19] Xiao Qin, Pratomo Widodo, dan Sulis Triyono, "An Analysis of the Translation of Cultural Humor in the Novel 'Huo Zhe,'" *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 2, no. 6 (2019): 185–192, https://www.neliti.com/publications/292455/an-analysis-of-the-translation-of-cultural-humor-in-the-novel-huo-zhe#cite.

Coherence depends heavily on cultural contexts, as meanings that resonate in one culture may not in another. To make humor effective across languages, translators must adapt both the text's structure and meaning to fit the target culture's shared knowledge and values.[20] A joke that is logical and funny in one culture may confuse another audience without the same cultural background, especially if it relies on local idioms or social norms. To keep the humor coherent in translation, the translator must adapt the joke, such as replacing the original wordplay with an equivalent English pun, to fit the target culture and language.

The humor in this case relies on Jakarta's well-known traffic jams, exaggerating the situation by joking that even walking would cause a jam. This joke resonates with Indonesians familiar with the city's traffic but may confuse international audiences. To make it clear in English, the translator should add context or replace the traffic jam reference with a more relatable concept.

> *"Kenapa orang Jakarta selalu naik motor ke mana-mana?"*
> *"Karena kalau jalan, selalu macet!"*

> "Why do people in New York always take the subway?"
> "Because if they drive, they'll never move!"

The joke was adapted to reflect New York City's traffic, making it relatable for English-speaking audiences while preserving the original humor. The translator used cultural substitution and contextualization to maintain coherence and ensure the punchline resonates with the target audience. These strategies help humor survive translation and stay enjoyable across different cultural contexts.

Matter of Implicature in the Sense of Interpretation

Beside coherence, the matter of pragmatic equivalence also relies on action of implying meaning. Implying means understanding meanings beyond literal aspects. This is a way to know that though if words are not totally cohesive, it still could make sense. In implying, there are always links between a text and audience. If the two are connected, then the meanings are understood.[21] It is flexible and does not follow rigid grammatical formulas, often explaining itself with just a few words. Many humorists use this technique to create

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[20] Fabrizio Coticchia dan Andrea Catanzaro, "The Fog of Words: Assessing the Problematic Relationship between Strategic Narratives,(Master) Frames and Ideology," *Media, War and Conflict* 15, no. 4 (2020): 427–449, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1750635220965622.

[21] Othman Ahmad Abualadas, "Conversational Maxims in Fiction Translation: New Insights into Cooperation, Characterization, and Style," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguisticts* 9, no. 3 (2020): 637–645, https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/IJAL/article/view/23214.

jokes that seem simple but are actually complex, relying on implicit meaning and imaginary connections in the mind.

The imagination itself conceptually consists of two main aspects; supplemental and explanatory coherence.[22] A coherent text often starts with a formal tone and may become informal later, where the formal part acts as a premise (supplemental coherence) leading to a punchline in humor. Supplemental coherence strengthens the text, while explanatory coherence explores the deeper implied meanings within it.

> A client brought her two cats to my veterinary clinic for their annual checkup. One was a small-framed, round tiger-striped tabby, while the other was a long, sleek black cat. She watched closely as I put each on the scale. "They weigh about the same," I told her. "That proves it!" she exclaimed. "Black does make you look slimmer. And stripes make you look fat."

> *Seorang pengunjung membawa dua kucingnya ke klinik hewan saya untuk pemeriksaan tahunan mereka. Yang satu adalah kucing betina kecil berbulu seperti corak harimau. Satunya adalah kucing hitam yang ramping. Klien itu memperhatikan saat saya menimbang keduanya. "Berat keduanya hampir sama," ujar saya padanya. "Nah, itu buktinya!" serunya. "Warna hitam membuatmu terlihat lebih ramping. Dan corak garis-garis membuatmu terlihat gemuk."*

The main idea is to draw a resemblance between cats' fur patterns and human clothing styles, using humor to highlight how certain patterns can shape impressions. The audience must interpret this humor indirectly, by linking the visual patterns on cats to fashion cues in human contexts.[23] Then, it is applied to other matters. It may be seen as complicated, but that is how a human's mind works. Humans could connect meaning of one to another if there is such similarity within, that in this case is the pattern of the bodies.

> Barusan saya ke apotek beli obat tidur, pas pulang saya bawanya pelan-pelan, takut obatnya bangun.

> *I went to the pharmacy to buy sleeping pills; I carefully brought them home, not to wake them up on the way home.*

The joke plays on the personification of sleeping pills, imagining them as if they could sleep, creating humor through exaggeration and contrast. Despite translation challenges, the shared linguistic structure between Bahasa and English supports coherence, showing that implied meanings don't need to be formal but must remain understandable,

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[22] Qin, Pratomo Widodo, dan Sulis Triyono, "An Analysis of the Translation of Cultural Humor in the Novel 'Huo Zhe.'"

[23] Abualadas, "Conversational Maxims in Fiction Translation: New Insights into Cooperation, Characterization, and Style."

often involving implicature and conceptual leaps.[24] Implicature adds a layer of meaning beyond grammatical structure, allowing humor to convey ideas through subtext rather than literal language. This is especially true in puns, where the entertainment comes from recognizing the implied, non-literal meanings behind the words.

Indeed, translating puns is challenging since sometimes it needs a bridge to connect one to another. In one culture, it may be easily understood, but in another one, it will totally lose meaning if the translator did not give another clue.[25] Once a clue could not give better meanings, the translator should explain it. However, the audience will get it but the risk is that they will not laugh since they already know the rationale of the humor.

> *Burung apa yang suka nolak?*
> *Burung gak gak.*
>
> Which bird likes to refuse anything?
> Crow
> (Crow is *gagak* in Bahasa, and refusing is saying *gak* in Bahasa).

The main difficulty in translating the humor lies in preserving a literal pun that only works in Bahasa, as direct translation often loses the wordplay or cultural nuance. To maintain coherence, the translator may need to provide clues, but this can reduce the humor's impact since the audience's mental leap becomes guided rather than spontaneous.[26] Once it is explained, it becomes usual and literal again. The element of surprise in a joke is already gone once it is explained. Therefore, the choice is to keep it mysterious but the meaning is not delivered, or otherwise.

> I was wondering why the ball was getting bigger. Then it hit me.
>
> *Saya bertanya-tanya kenapa bola itu menjadi semakin besar. Lalu aku tersadar/Lalu itu membenturku.*

The humor is difficult to translate because it relies on the English idiom "hit," which lacks an equivalent in Bahasa. While the context of an approaching ball is clear, the pun involving "hit" as both physical impact and sudden realization is lost, showing that even coherence can't bridge idiomatic gaps.[27] It brings other perspective but the intended meaning

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[24] Wulandari et al., "The Semiotic Analysis Meaning of Love in Last Night on Earth by Green Day."
[25] Paronyan, "Pragmatic Equivalence in Literary Translation."
[26] Coticchia dan Andrea Catanzaro, "The Fog of Words: Assessing the Problematic Relationship between Strategic Narratives,(Master) Frames and Ideology."
[27] Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*.

is not well delivered. Therefore, the clue from the translator is needed to explain the situation in context of Bahasa.

"Why don't skeletons fight each other?
Because they don't have guts".

"Mengapa tengkorak tidak berkelahi satu sama lain?
Karena mereka tidak mempunyai isi perut".

The humor in this joke relies on a double meaning, where "guts" refers both to bravery and physical organs. Translating this into another language could easily lose its humor if the double meaning of "guts" does not exist. A literal translation might explain the punchline, but it would no longer cause laughter since the wordplay is lost.[28] The translator could attempt to replace the joke with a culturally equivalent one, but even then, the humor may not resonate with the target audience in the same way.

Similar to the challenge of translating humor like "Burung gak-gak," translators must choose between explaining the joke or replacing it with a culturally relatable equivalent. This reflects the delicate balance in humor translation, preserving coherence while retaining the comedic effect, often a near-impossible task without compromising the original humor.[29] Furthermore, implicature relies heavily on context, as the surrounding cultural, social, and situational elements significantly influence how implied meanings are interpreted.[30] The audience's background knowledge, shared experiences, and cultural norms deeply influence how they interpret humor's subtext. Therefore, in humor translation, understanding and adapting to these cultural frames is essential, as the same joke can carry vastly different meanings across cultures.

"What did the grape do when it got stepped on?"
"Nothing, it just let out a little wine!"

"Apa yang dilakukan anggur saat diinjak?"
"Tidak ada, dia hanya mengeluarkan sedikit anggur!

This joke hinges on the double meaning of "wine" as both a beverage and a play on the word "whine," suggesting the sound a grape makes when squished. Although the

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[28] Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij dan Elisabeth Piirainen, *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives* (Moscow: De Gruyter, Incorporated, 2023).

[29] Qin, Pratomo Widodo, dan Sulis Triyono, "An Analysis of the Translation of Cultural Humor in the Novel 'Huo Zhe.'"

[30] Mona Baker, "Reframing Conflict in Translation," *Social Semiotics* 17, no. 2 (2007): 151–169, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10350330701311454.

translation may preserve the structure, the humor often falls flat for Indonesian audiences due to limited wine culture and unfamiliarity with the pun.

> *"Apa yang dilakukan pisang saat diinjak?"*
> *"Tidak ada, dia hanya mengeluarkan sedikit sambal!"*

> "What does a banana do when stopped on?"
> "Nothing, it just lets out a little chili sauce!"

According to this adaptation, the translator substitutes "grape" with "banana," a fruit more familiar and widely consumed in Indonesia. The punchline shifts to chili sauce, a condiment that resonates with the Indonesian palate and culture. This transformation maintains the humor by allowing the audience to relate to the joke culturally and subtextually as well.[31] Context plays a crucial role in shaping implicature, making it essential for translators to navigate cultural nuances thoughtfully. By aligning jokes with the target audience's cultural references, offering contextual clues, and drawing on shared experiences, translators can preserve coherence and ensure the humor remains engaging and understandable.

Better Understanding but Less Laugh in Translating Humor

The jokes and their translations above show that there is cooperative principle in implicature that the audience observes in order to connect to the text. Though it could be explained clearly, meanings in implicature are still open, ambiguous, and open up to various possibilities. Somehow, implicature opens up indeterminate translations that will result in different interpretations further.[32] It also relates to unknown implications of a word hoped by a translator to be given to the audience.

The matter of implicature is also in line with Grice's maxims. It is indicated through quantities, qualities, relevant relations, and manners.[33] Quantity in translation limits information to what is necessary, while quality depends on the accuracy and truthfulness of the translation, with additional evidence sought if uncertain. Relevance ensures precise alignment between source and target languages, and manners require the translation to be clear, concise, and follow language rules.

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[31] M Reza Ishadi Fadillah, Rommel Utungga Pasopati, dan Devito Andharu, "Dampak Terpaan Konten Media Sosial Instagram terhadap Keterampilan Komunikasi Interpersonal Siswa SMK Unitomo Surabaya," *Kaganga Komunika* 7, no. 1 (2025): 1–11, https://jurnal.uts.ac.id/index.php/KAGANGA/article/view/5686.

[32] Nakhli, "Pragmatic Aspects of Translation."

[33] Nur Azim Laila, "Cooperative Principles in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Debate: Grice's Maxim Analysis," *Applied Linguistics Research Journal* 2019, no. 4 (2019): 1, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337418048_Cooperative_Principles_in_the_2019_Indonesian_Presidential_Debate_Grice's_Maxim_Analysis.

Interestingly, humor violates all of those maxims above. It is out of any quantity aspect since humor as seen in jokes tends to contain more information than it should. It is used to attract imagination from the audience to understand and to laugh at the jokes and even ironies.[34] Humor contains less truthfulness as its main goal is to entertain, not inform, and its relevance is culturally specific, understood only by those familiar with the language. Additionally, humor often uses exaggeration and redundancy, making its meaning less clear and more opaque.

Due to these violations, achieving coherence in humor translation is problematic, making it challenging and nearly impossible. Since humor is deeply cultural, only those within that culture truly understand it, meaning its meaning remains specific despite pragmatic attempts to broaden its reach.[35] Besides, it is quite problematic either since incorrect different translations in a word could change the whole meaning.

In this case, humor loses its ability to provoke laughter because the translator takes over the audience's role in interpreting it. To bridge knowledge gaps, translators use analogies, but this can lead to over-interpretation and fixed meanings, making the humor grammatically correct yet unfunny by removing its spontaneous, playful nature.

Kalau nikah gak ada walinya, boleh ganti slank atau noah gak?

If there is no wali (marriage guardian) in a marriage ceremony, can it be changed to slank or noah?
(Wali is someone that represents the woman's parents to marry with the man in Islamic marriage ceremony. Wali is also the name of a music band, alongside with Slank and Noah.

The translation contains rich cultural references, such as Islamic marriage customs and popular Indonesian bands like Slank and Noah, which may be unfamiliar to Western audiences. Since these elements lack coherence and relevance for non-Indonesian readers, a translator's guide is essential to explain the context, even if it diminishes the humor.

Q: What did the cat say when he lost all his money?
A: I'm paw
(Paw is the pun of poor. Since it is a cat, his word is related to his identity)

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[34] Putri Ayu Millenia et al., "The Implementation of Irony of The Old Man as Indicated on Luigi Pirandello's War," *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan* 2, no. 1 (2023): 29–35, https://journal.admi.or.id/index.php/JUSHPEN/article/view/561.

[35] Sepri Kurniadi, "A Gricean Maxim Analysis in Teaching and Learning Process at Higher Level Education," *Jurnal Inovasi Teknologi dan Rekayasa* 6, no. 2 (2021): 112–118, https://inotera.poltas.ac.id/index.php/inotera/article/view/145.

Q: Apa yang seekor kucing katakan saat ia kehilangan semua uangnya?
A: Saya cakar/miskin.
(Paw means *cakar* in Bahasa, while poor means *miskin* in Bahasa).

The translation involves double coherence, requiring understanding of both the original pun and its equivalent in the target language. For example, the English pun about "paw" and cats is lost in Bahasa Indonesia, where "cakar" and "miskin" have different meanings, making a translator's guidance essential. This case shows that coherence has limitations, as understanding depends on cultural and contextual knowledge that may not easily transfer across languages.[36] Paw is associated with English and its pun could only be correlated for those who understand the theme of cats. It will be a problem if translated to another language. The restrictions are indicated through the situations in other cultures.

Following the sense of Bahasa, paw is *cakar* that does not have any resemblance in its literal and phoneme meanings. Translating paw and poor is difficult in Bahasa since the language has its own characteristics. In other words, the limitations and restrictions of pragmatic equivalence exist when there are more than one level of meaning.[37] Indeed, humor in many aspects, including puns, used to have several levels. Translating the humor then is not only about bringing the context, but also solving the levels into known meanings brought to the audience.

In humor translation, achieving a balance between clarity and comedic impact is essential but challenging. Translators navigate language nuances, cultural context, and audience expectations, often using familiar analogies to preserve both understanding and humor.[38] This involves replacing specific cultural references with equivalent ones that evoke similar sentiments.

"I'm reading a book on anti-gravity. It's impossible to put down!"

"Saya sedang membaca buku tentang anti-gravitasi. Buku itu membuat saya tidak bisa berhenti!" ("I'm reading a book on anti-gravity. The book makes me unable to stop!")

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[36] Muchammad Daffa Firzatullah et al., "The Persistence of Modernity in Affecting Identities in Literature and Comic Studies," in *Proceeding International Conference on Religion, Science and Education*, vol. 4, 2025, 1069–1077, https://sunankalijaga.org/prosiding/index.php/icrse/article/view/1542.
[37] Wulandari et al., "The Semiotic Analysis Meaning of Love in Last Night on Earth by Green Day."
[38] Stephen Leacock, *Humor : its Theory and Technique, with Examples and Samples; a Book of Discovery* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 2020).

The English humor relies on the double meaning of "impossible to put down," both literally and figuratively. In the adaptation, the focus shifts to a captivating book, using analogies to connect concepts and make the humor clear for Indonesian readers.[39]

By linking familiar situations, ideas, or cultural references, translators create subtextual familiarity that strengthens the joke's impact. This use of analogies enhances engagement and helps humor cross linguistic and cultural boundaries, making it more accessible and enjoyable for diverse audiences.

CONCLUSION

Pragmatic equivalence plays a crucial role in achieving better understanding in translation, particularly through the aspects of coherence and implication. Coherence in translation refers to how a text is interpreted not only literally but also culturally and subtextually. This means that the meaning of a text can very depending on the cultural background and shared knowledge between the speaker and the audience. Implication, on the other hand, deals with the concept of implicature, where a text may contain meanings that go beyond its explicit structure. These implied meanings might seem illogical or indirect, yet the audience can grasp them through context and shared understanding. Both coherence and implication are especially important when translating humor, as humor often relies on subtle cultural cues, double meanings, and unexpected twists that can provoke laughter. Translators must be mindful of these factors to ensure that the humor's essence is preserved while maintaining the original mood and tone. This careful balancing act is essential because humor can lose its effect if translated too literally or if the cultural references are not properly adapted.

However, translating humor using pragmatic equivalence also presents significant challenges. Translators must fill in the gaps of knowledge that may exist between the source and target cultures, which often requires creative adjustments to maintain the joke's impact. While increasing coherence in the target text can help make the humor more understandable, it also risks reducing the spontaneity and surprise that generate laughter. This tension means that translators must carefully consider how much to clarify or adapt without stripping away the humor's original charm. The ultimate goal is to deliver the joke's meaning and comedic effect in a way that resonates with the new audience. Consequently, translators should

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[39] Jessica Milner Davis dan Jennifer Hofmann, "The Humor Transaction Schema: A Conceptual Framework for Researching the Nature and Effects of Humor," *Humor* 36, no. 2 (2023): 323–353, https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/humor-2020-0143/html.

approach humorous texts with sensitivity and flexibility, employing strategies that preserve both the cultural nuances and the subtextual layers. By doing so, they can bridge the gap between languages and cultures, ensuring that humor remains an effective and enjoyable element in translation.

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