

# MİZAHIN ÇEVİRİLEBİLİRLİK İHTİMALİ ÜZERİNE

## Relating to the Translatability of Humour

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### ABSTRACT

In this particular study, the possibility of 'translatability or untranslatability' concepts is discussed. Cultural structures play important roles in particular concepts or expressions and texts including these concepts and expressions are difficult to be translated in terms of reflecting the climate of the source language to the target language. In our study, the differences existing in linguistic and medial worlds and the effect of the genre of the translation text were taken into consideration and humour translations were taken as examples throughout this translation activity process. Humour definitions in terms of national or universal sense, the semantic and contextual changes having occurred from past to present about humour and effects of these changes on linguistic structure are some of the topics discussed here and Nasreddin Hodja humours were analysed as example because his humours reflect life style, humour elements, type of irony and amusement and skills of compliment and satire of Anatolian people. No matter what the quality of this particular genre is, this question was intended to be answered: 'to what extent this translation could be regarded as "funny" for target language with its traditions and nature of its interogative features for cultural structure and rules'.

### Key Words

Humour, Translation, Culture, Image, Linguistic World.

### ÖZ

İlgili çalışmada özellikle kültürel yapıların rol oynadığı kavramların ya da ifadelerin yer aldığı metinlerde hangi çeviri türü ya da metodu tercih edilirse edilsin, çıkış dilin doğasının hedef dile yansıtılmasının neredeyse imkansız olduğu konusu işlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu etkinlik sürecinde dilsel dünyaların farklılığının yanında çevrilecek olan metnin türünün de etkisine birçok görüşten hareketle değinilmiş ve örnek olarak mizah çevirilerine yer verilmiştir. Çeviri metni olarak Anadolu halkının yaşama biçimini, güldürü ögesini, alay ve eğlenme türünü, övgü ve yergi becerisini dile getiren Nasrettin Hoca'nın fıkraları tercih edilmiştir. Ayrıca mizahın ulusal ya da evrensel nitelikte ne anlama geldiği, mizah kavramının anlamsal ve içeriksel boyutta ne gibi değişikliklere uğradığı, bu değişimin kullanılan dilsel yapıya nasıl etki ettiği, üslup açısından içermiş olduğu dil oyunlarının çevrilebilirlik ihtimallerinin ne olduğu yönünde açıklamalara yer verilmiş, tercih edilen metinler üzerinde gerek toplumsal, eğitsel gerekse psikolojik ve estetik yanı olan söz konusu türün hangi yapıda karşımıza çıksın çıksın içermiş olduğu geleneksel ve kültürel yapının hatta bunları sorgulayıcı yapısının çevirisinin hedef dil için ne kadar "komik" olabileceği sorusu cevaplandırılmaya çalışılmıştır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Mizah, Çeviri, Kültür, İmge, Dilsel Dünya.

Many different definitions have been suggested about the activity of translation but the definition diversity mentioned here reflects the problems that this activity has. Wills defined the activity of translation as a factor which gathers people who share different language and cultures into common ground (Wills, 1977). The ques-

tion is; in what extent it is possible to carry out this matter. It is considered that it would not be wrong if we mention that it is possible with the rate of translatability of the text. The issue of translatability or untranslatability has been one of the topics which have been continually discussed so far. Some questions, such as what kind of

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texts are translatable or what kind of texts are not translatable and what are the main principles in translatability, are few of the questions that have been still argued. As it was stated before by R. W. Jumpelt, it is inarguable to say that genre of the text is the main element determining translation principles and methods (Stolze 2001:71). In this case, as it was stated by Koller, it is necessary to develop different translation theories for every genre of translation text rather than a unique theory (Koller 1997: 33).

On the other side, Nida and Taber suggested that cultural elements should be reflected in translated text and they pointed out that it is necessary for a translator to act according to this issue (1969: 134-203). Hohn, also, supported this view and he states that problems, which occur during translation activity process, result from not transferring linguistic structures but transferring cultural structures to target language and he emphasizes that translated text should be regarded as a new text. Van de Broeck, who has had works on cultural and linguistic equivalences in translation, emphasizes that we can evaluate a translation text as it is completed only if his view about correspondence is met with local, temporal and traditional elements in the target text in addition to the communicational value of the course text (Gentzler 1993: 98).

On this occasion, when it is evaluated in general terms the process of translation appears in three stages. These problems may be related with source text, linguistic properties in texts and third category including all

kinds of plan on words, rhyme and vowel or structure harmony, when a concept exists in source culture but it does not exist in target culture and existence of humour, jokes or humour structures (Wills 1977).

According to Toury, a translation can be evaluated as successful only if it is accepted as appropriate in its own source society and acceptable in target culture (Toury 1995: 23).

As it can be understood from these statements, cultural structure is the main topic I emphasize predominantly to be followed by the translator. The reason is that translatability rate of humour, which is the title of our study, is associated mostly with social values and cultural structure that were stated under the name of 'other category' before.

However, genre of the text is the only factor which generally determines the way of the translator. No matter what the genre or the function of the text is, communicative equivalence is the most significant factor in both texts. After the information given about translation above, the humour of language, its social and cultural structure will be indicated before analysing the possibility of humour translation on a text.

When the notion "humour" is used, a joke or entertainment and laughing occur in our minds for the first time. This word is added into our language from Arabic word "müzah" (Usta, 2005: 23). However, because of the fact that humour is also a social concept, it has had many different meaning through years from past to present. Humour is stated as *gül-*

*mece* (humour) (<http://tdkterim.gov.tr/bts/12.09.2011>) in the dictionary of Turkish Language Institution. From past to present, when we look at the definitions of humour in different fields such as philosophy, mathematics, linguistics; it is possible to say that humour is an activity in general sense, it is an example of human behaviour and it reveals itself in every part of life. When we consider the question of whether anything which is laughable or makes us laugh is regarded as humour or not; Ross stated with respect to this issue that it is possible to say that some things are humorous even though no one laughs at it (Ross 1998: 1). According to Aziz Nesin, laughing is necessary for humour and we cannot talk about humour if laughing does not exist (Nesin 1973).

Morreall stated humour in his work in the way that humour is, in fact, a kind of excess of energy and spending a spiritual energy by taking into consideration psychological, social and cultural processes. In fact, it is possible to say that humour is a complex and confusing phenomena in terms of physical, psychological, cultural and social view and it is interacted with culture when it is being transferred to another culture and socio-cultural structure of a society determines the way of performing humour and its process because these structures are the mirrors of the structures of the society such as thinking, interpreting and explaining (Usta 2005: 36-38) Humour's significant role in traditional, cultural structure and even societal rules is discussed because alleged differences or criticism in traditional and cultural structure

are reflected by humour (Eker 2009: 29-35). Therefore, the quality of humour might change. Although humour is defined as a genre here, Rifat Ilgaz suggested that humour is not a literal genre at all and it is a kind of style. He regarded humour as a seasoning that stems from our individual and social temperament and he stated that it is not in the quality of information and it is not possible to acquire humour (Özbilgin 1993: 118). Özerkan indicated that cultural structure of a society forms its own humour structures and he suggested that one has to know the culture of given society very well in order to understand humour of any society (Özerkan 2001: 80). Language transfers cultures, determines its boundaries and language is the mirror of productiveness, so to know a culture means to know its language very well. According to Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, societies perceive world to the extent that their languages allow for them and they shape their own thinking and cultures through their languages. When we consider humour as an ideational structure, it is unarguable that humour understandings of the societies are not mutually understandable so it is too hard to constitute international or universal humours. Morreall's statement shows this linguistic and cultural share clearly. According to Özünlü, humour makes use of some structures of language for its own purposes so a different language and a different system are created by the user of this humour. He also states that when normal systems of a standard language are used for exceptional locations, purposes and forms, it is assumed that totally different language is used (Özünlü 1993: 3-14).

However, the structure of humour is universal even though it is divided into groups and it differs in nations. That is, its content is different. How is it possible to translate this contextual and structural common structure? Is it translatable? Is it possible to create the effect of humour in target language when it is translated? In accordance with the information given about translation and humour, it is aimed to answer the questions about translatability rate of humour language by analysing Nasreddin Hodja's jokes.

### **Translatability rate of humour language**

It is clear that humour has sociological, psychological, entertainment and communicative functions. While some people think humour as a relaxing element, others may think humour as a sign of ironicalness. According to Usta, there is only one reality that humour language is very productive and rich and it is possible to colour humour language with many puns such as assimilation, simile, exaggerating, allowing for polysemy, personification, creating a contrast, derivation, irony, marking shifting. It seems that applications, such as sound, word, syntax and meaning deviations are performed in structural sense (Usta 2005). In the end, humour understanding does not change but concepts, words or the way of application of humour change.

#### **MEKTUP**

Bir gün Hoca'nın okuma yazma bilmeyen bir komşusu Hoca'ya geldi ve ona bir mektup gösterdi.

Adam:

-Hocam ben okuma yazma bilmem. Şu mektubu benim için okuyabilir misin?

Hoca, mektuba şöyle bir baktı. Evirdi çevirdi ve;

"Kusura bakma komşu mektubu okuyamıyorum."

Adam:

-Hocam, utan utan benden utanmıyorsan şu kafadaki kavuğundan utan!

Hoca cevap verdi:

-Eğer kabiliyet (keramet) kavuktaysa al kavuğu başına koyda sen oku mektubu.

#### **THE LETTER -**

One day a neighbor of Nasreddin Hoca who doesn't know how to read and write came near Hodja and showed a letter.

The man said:

-My dear Hodja can you read this letter for me. I don't know how to read and write.

Hoca looked at the letter and he turned it around and around.

"My neighbor I'm sorry. I'm not able to read it."

The man said:

-Hodja if you aren't ashamed of me, be ashamed of the turban which is on your head.

Hodja answered:

-If the turban has the ability to read, take it and put it on your head, you read the letter.

(Sak 1968, 1976).

When we look at our second text, the most distinctive object here is quilted turban in cultural sense. When we look at the history of West, it is seen that "kavuk" is translated into "turban" because of the fact that there is not any historical background about "kavuk" in Western history and the image of "kavuk" and "turban" are not corresponded to each other. The issue of non-equivalence between these two notions is clearly stated in cultural memory concept of Assman. Assman pointed out that writing is a kind of expression of thoughts; images and visual objects, which are really important in our lives, are in fact an extension of connection between memory and imaginary thing (Assman 2001: 28-30). The difference in "quilted turban" and "turban" concepts,

in fact, are a manifestation of cultural memory. Normally, quilted turban represents a status and position. Quilted turban is, in fact, a kind of hat which was worn by Ottoman Sultans and emperors and of which inside is empty. However, the point that is emphasized here is that the people who show the right way are the people who do not care about quilted turban, reign and fur. Another important structure is that illiteracy is considered as unusual in the West. Rather than contextual meaning, it was tried to give lexical equivalence derived from not overlapping. For this reason, this object which consists of only the definer does not have any meaning in target language. Since “altering” and “converting” are expressions that are used in Turkish, they are given with lexical meaning in translation and it does not contain any meaning which is exaggerated. Another way of addressing is “komşu” and it is denotative equivalent with “neighbour” translation but it was not possible to give its cultural meaning. Since a saying in Turkish language which means ‘everyone needs his neighbour’s help even if it has bad sides’ and it shows importance of neighbourhood and there are many sayings and proverbs in Turkish which are similar to this saying but there is none in the West. The saying “Shame on you” and another saying “If you are not ashamed of me, be ashamed of your quilted turban”, all of them are expressions which are not only social but also socio-political and it is hard to find their equivalences in target language. It is stated here that it means receiving respect or having dignitary

by means of taking quilted turban and wearing it. It is not possible to see it in the culture of target language.

### **EŞEĞİN İNADI**

Nasrettin Hoca'nın Karakaçan adında bir eşeği vardı. Karakaçan, çok cefakar ve vefakar bir hayvandı.

Yaz, kış Hoca'yı ve bir sürü yükü sırtında taşıdı.

Hoca:

-Yürü Karakaçan, deyince yürür; dur Karakaçan, deyince dururdu.

Fakat, bir gün Karakaçan'ın inadı tuttu. Hoca; dur, deyince durmadı. Yürü, deyince yürümedi.

Hoca, çok sinirlendi. Karakaçan'a dayak attı ve ahıra bıraktı.

Oğluna yüksek sesle şöyle dedi:

-Oğlum, Karakaçan'a ne yem ver ne de su ver! Bırak açlıktan ölsün!

Biraz sonra ahırdan uzaklaştılar.

Hoca, oğlunun kulağına fısıldayarak:

-Aman oğlum, ben onu korkutmak için öyle söyledim. Sen, onun yemini de, suyunu da ver!

### **OBSTINACY OF THE DONKEY -**

Nasrettin Hodja had a donkey called Karakaçan. Karakaçan was a very long-suffering and very faithful animal.

Summer and winter he carried lots of freight and Hodja on his back.

When Hodja says:

-Walk Karakaçan! He walks!

When Hodja says:

-Stop Karakaçan! he stops!

But one day Karakaçan had a fit of obstinacy.

When Hodja says

-Stop Karakaçan! he didn't stop!

When Hodja says:

-Walk Karakaçan! He didn't walk!

So Hodja got very nervous and he gave Karakaçan a beating. He left him in the stable.

He said his son loudly:

-My son give Karakaçan neither feed nor water. Let him die because of hunger!

After that they went away from the stable.

Hodja whispered to his son's ear:

-Oh my son I said this to Karakaçan to frighten him. Now give either feed or water to him.

(Sak 1968, 1976).

It seems that he used donkey which is an important mount for Anatolian people in this joke. ‘Donkey’ is an important element for most Turkish sayings and proverbs.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most important and distinctive themes in the humours of Nasreddin Hodja is donkey. Donkey is, in fact, regarded as satire and ridicule element. Donkey is the most common symbol for pain, bothers, beat, hunger and suffering in the products which are created by Anatolian people. In the humours which were produced around aristocracy and palaces, horse rather than donkey has a wide coverage (İlhan, Durmuş, 1999)

Here, it seems that laughing element and satirical element are placed next to each other in humour. The name of the donkey “karakaçan”, personification of the donkey with “cefakâr” (rugged) and vefakâr” (loyal) expressions, donkey having a fit of obstinacy, “it is not walking when someone says “walk” for it”, speaking loudly in order to scare donkey; all of them are expressions that only Anatolian people can understand. These expressions are hard to understand for someone who is speaking same language but who did not grow up in a village or who does not know anything about village life and it is harder for someone who is from a foreign culture and it is hard to understand them even in humorous sense. As it can be understood from translations, structural and conceptual equivalences are taken into consideration but contextual image cannot be translated into target language even though representations exist.

#### THE CAULDRON GAVE A BIRTH TO

Bir gün Nasreddin Hoca'nın bir kazana ihtiyacı oldu. Kazan istemek için bir komşusuna gitti.

Komşusu ona kazanı verdi. Birkaç gün sonra kazanı almak için hocanın evine gitti.

Hoca kazanın içine küçük bir kazan daha koydu ve komşusuna verdi. Adam kazanı görünce çok şaşırıldı ve ona sordu.

“Sayın Hocam bu kazanın içindeki nedir? Burada iki tane kazan var.”

Hoca cevap verdi:

“Senin kazan doğurdu. Hoca'nın komşusu çok şaşırıldı ve sevindi fakat bir şey söylemeden evine gitti.”

Birkaç gün sonra hoca tekrar kazanı ödünç almak istedi, kazanı aldı ama tekrar geri götürmedi.

Komşusu kazanı çok merak etti. Doğru Hoca'nın evine gitti ve kapıyı çaldı.

Hoca kapıyı açtı. Komşusu sordu:

“Sayın Hocam benim kazan nerede?”

“Senin kazan öldü.” diye cevap verdi Hoca.

Adam, çok şaşırıldı ve sordu:

“Hocam hiç kazan ölür mü?”

Hoca, adama güldü ve dedi ki:

“Sayın komşum, kazanın doğurduğuna inanıyorsun da öldüğüne niçin inanmıyorsun?”

#### - KAZAN DOĞURDU

One day Nasreddin Hodja needed a cauldron. He went to a neighbor of him and wanted a cauldron.

His neighbor gave it to him. After a few days his neighbor came to Hodja's house. And wanted to get the cauldron.

Hodja put a small cauldron in the big cauldron. He gave it to his neighbor. When he saw two cauldrons he was very surprised. And asked him:

“Dear Hodja what is that in the cauldron. There are two cauldrons here.”

Hodja answered:

“Your cauldron has given birth to another cauldron.” Hodja's neighbor was surprised and very pleased. But he didn't say anything and went to his house.

After a few days Hodja wanted to borrow the cauldron from his neighbor. This time Hodja didn't take the cauldron. His neighbor was worried about it.

So he went to Hodja's house and knocked on the door.

Hodja opened the door. His neighbor asked:

“Dear Hodja where is my cauldron.”  
“Your cauldron has died.” answered Hodja.  
The man was very surprised and asked:  
“Hodja, does a cauldron die?”  
Hodja laughed at him and said:  
“My dear neighbor, you believe that your  
cauldron. Why don’t you believe it has died.”  
(Sak 1968, 1976).

“Cauldron”, “cauldron’s giving birth” and death of cauldron” are themes of this alleged joke. Firstly, we have to deal with the concept of cauldron. Cauldron is a kind of deep vessel with two handles which is made from thick copper in which meals are cooked on the cook stove in weddings in Anatolian. However, its quality in this joke is somehow different. First of all, we have to know whether target language has any concept or image like cauldron. The concept of “kazan” is translated into target language as “cauldron” in terms of its function. When we analyse the analysis of other sentences, it is clear that “giving birth of cauldron” and “death of cauldron” are translated into target language in one-to-one correspondence. Here, stresses which attract attention and give meaning to the humour are important, too. Since it is not possible to transfer these stresses to target language, it was not possible to translate them into target language as we can see it in the sentences “Sayın komşum” and “Senin kazan doğurdu”. For example, another type of translation of these sentences proves that these sentences are translated into target language as “My dear neighbour” or “Your cauldron has given birth to another cauldron” and the way of translating last sentence as “Senin kazan başka kazan doğurdu”.

When we considered the meaning given behind these particular concepts, these alleged jokes consist of

the focus thinking point of Anatolian people as it is stated before. The codifications that are peculiar to Anatolian culture can only be made sense by the people who are living in this particular culture or linguistic world of this culture. Teller’s intention shows that you should not question the thing that you get for free, however you should follow the thing you lost. Firstly, the neighbour asks what has happened to his cauldron after he got two cauldrons instead of one, and then he accepts what Nasreddin Hodja says about his cauldron even though he does not believe that his cauldron has given birth but he looks after his own interest and lastly he investigates what has happened to his cauldron when he hears that his cauldron is dead because of a lost and he puts forward that it is not possible for a cauldron to be dead. Nasreddin Hodja firstly exaggerates the situation here and then he creates a contrast and he gives a good listen. However, it is possible to say that another theme might be used in target language rather than cauldron because intellectual and cultural structures are different. It is also a reality that target language can be used by the characters that are in the quality of humour in their own language for the characters that make contact with others. In this case, this particular joke will not be considered as the humour factor in target language because world of imagination and in parallel with these representations are different in terms of giving a good lesson.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult to apply concepts like “correspondence” and “relevance” as Van de Broeck stated before because the examples we gave here represent groups

belonging to a particular society and its life style, this particular society has many characteristics such as being clever, loyal, emotionless, shy, reckless, bewildered, tricky and precipitous and this information and related groups are mentioned here as satire, compliment, entertainment, ridicule, having someone laugh on, causing a confusion and contradiction and in addition to these matters sayings which are specified to the colloquial language exist in these examples. In order to catch the communicative value of the text in sentences, temporal and local and traditional elements are tried to be translated into target language as much equivalences as it can be, but it is not enough for the target text to be in the quality of humour.

### CONCLUSION

It is clearly understood that Nasreddin Hodja used different symbols, such as donkey, caldron, quilted turban, in his each three humours and he used these symbols to criticize things humorously and he makes references to Anatolian people to teach lesson. He gives social messages to world through his humour style and his humours reflect life style of Anatolian people. This particular humorous language not only criticizes things, but also it makes people laugh. However, it is important to mention that because of the fact that these aforementioned messages have cultural elements, only the people who share common linguistic and cultural memory are able to decode these messages. It means that they can understand this language. It is not wrong to say that the most difficult part of translation process begins here because the thing that makes people from different cultures and languages laugh is not always the same.

Cultural proficiency is precisely necessary in order to be able to translate particular sentences in which there are specific and cultural elements. In addition to linguistic analysis, there should be humorous sensibility of the translator. It is unarguable that it is really difficult to criticize things and transfer intended message to the people on the same degree. Based on unique and different cultural codifications for each country and these codes are made sense by the people who are living in this particular society, it is possible to occur meaning loss during translation process. Due to aforementioned reasons, with reference to the other views, it is not possible for a translator to process the product of translation or anticipate, guess and count expectations of the society which uses target language and provide its equivalences in the expectations stated in target language because intellectual and characteristic structures of target and source communities are different. That is, a translator can translate the text by depending on the source text and norms of the source text, but it causes a loss in the humour structure in translations. In the translation which depends on the target text and norms that are active in the target culture in which this particular target text will exist, it is somehow possible to provide humorous structure but it is hard to find these structures in target culture because it is difficult to find them in a genre which reveals local or traditional norms. As it can be understood from text type, alleged humour is not enough to transfer structure. Since no matter how literal the text is, translator comes across problems while trans-

lating this text because there is not any similar genre in target language.

Summarily, as it can be deduced from these examples, it is not possible to translate humour into another target language and culture because humour has psychological, social and cultural sides and it has indefinite plays on words in the form of expression, it changes according to the individuals rather than understanding of society, the quality of humour is changeable through time; these matters make translation norms and techniques impossible to be used and this makes the possibility of translatability in humour sense become nearly impossible.

#### NOTES

- 1 Eşeğe altın semer vursalar, eşek yine eşektir, Eşeğini sağlam kazığa bağla, sonra Allah'a ısmarla, Eşek bile bir düştüğü yere bir daha düşmez, Eşek hoşaftan ne anlar; suyunu içer, tanesini bırakır, Eşeğin kuyruğunu kalabalıkta kesme; kimi uzun, kimi kısa der.

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