



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Children's response to humor in translated poetry

Morta, A.R.

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Summary

The study sheds light on how children perceive humor in translated funny poems. Grade 3 pupils from the Philippines participated in poetry reading sessions to discuss poems translated from English into Filipino. The findings reveal that children are likely to appreciate the humor in the translations from a personal lens rather than a cultural one. Humor also motivates children to read more poems and to read more in Filipino. This finding suggests the need for more available reading materials in Filipino for Filipino children in this age range. In contrast to the findings of earlier studies, poor comprehension does not hinder humor appreciation and the study offers some insights into this. The study likewise confirms that humor is a social act: children are likely to appreciate a humorous text when it is read with others. That children can discuss the humor in the poems makes the texts funnier; this view contrasts with other studies that argue how humor is diminished when it is discussed. However, no preference is shown when it comes to children reading texts on their own or listening to the texts read to them. Furthermore, the mode of input does not affect the funniness of poems. Children perceive the humor in funny children's poems as universal (that is, it can be appreciated by adults as well) which suggests that children themselves agree that children's literature can have a dual readership. The study also reveals gender differences in humor appreciation. More boys than girls have responses that support the superiority theory of humor while more girls than boys have answers that substantiate the incongruity theory of humor. The study explores how a Filipino virtue could have influenced the children's responses. Finally, the study shows that content is more crucial than form in determining humor in funny poems for children. That is, a poem can still be funny even without rhyme and rhythm. This contradicts the notion that rhyme is indispensable in humorous children's poems. As opposed to the findings of other researchers, free verse (i.e., a poem lacking rhyme and rhythm) is seen to appeal to children. One recommendation given is to examine whether the results hold for children from a different age group and when the poems are instead translated from Filipino into English.

Chapter 2 focuses on the definition of children's literature. The chapter demonstrates that although children's literature can be defined, the task of defining it is open to debate since the definitions themselves are not fixed and scholars and practitioners have different, at times contradictory, ways of defining the genre. But these definitions exclude children's perspectives and are based solely on what adults think about children's literature. Thus, how children perceive texts primarily meant for them is examined in this study by inquiring about the intended audience of children's poems in the poetry reading sessions. Another aim of the chapter is to show how the understanding of children's literature is influenced by the evolving concepts of childhood, from medieval times until modern times. However, such concepts of childhood are culturally constructed and did not develop linearly for all cultures. Because the original poems are passed into a different culture when translated into Filipino, it is important to see whether the readers can connect with the poems' contexts. Whether the children can identify with the poems' characters and situations is explored in the poetry reading sessions. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the status of children's literature. For some scholars, children's literature does not enjoy the same status as adult literature. Nevertheless, this varies from culture to culture. The chapter ends with the introduction of role dualism, a concept formulated by the author that can be used to explain what legitimizes the role of adults as creators and controllers of what children can and should read.

It is not only children's literature that is peripherally situated but, quite often, so too is translated literature. Even-Zohar proposes this in his polysystem theory which is discussed in Chapter 3. It briefly examines how translated literature in the Philippines moved from a peripheral position to a central position during the Spanish colonial period. Special attention is given to this part of Philippine history as it was during this period when translated children's literature in the Philippines had been formalized. A historical take on the translation of children's literature in the Philippines provides insight into the evolving functions of translation in a former colony. To compare early and current functions, the chapter also discusses present directions in translated children's literature in the Philippines. Contemporary trends show that the translation of children's literature is still influenced by the country's colonial experience, as indicated for instance, by the number of bilingual books published for children. Such influence is corroborated by the results of the poetry reading sessions which looked at the children's preferred language for reading.

Poems are more challenging to translate than prose because the translator must consider not only the content but also the form which includes rhyme, rhythm and meter. In Chapter 4, it is shown that most of the time, the translator cannot be faithful to both form and content and must choose which to prioritize between the two. For this reason, two types of translations were used in the study: one based on form and another based on content. There are different frameworks available that can explain form-based translation. This study looks at two: Holmes' four forms of poetry translation and Kochol's three ways of translating poetic rhythm. However, although the frameworks are helpful to

some extent, they are not without limitations: certain cases do not fall neatly into a group or category. This suggests the need to use existing frameworks with caution and to update these by including new, even “hybrid”, classifications that can accommodate other cases. The chapter turns to Tsur’s cognitive poetics to explain why specific rhyme patterns are more appropriate for creating humorous poems. Regarding content, it is shown that even if the translator possesses creative freedom, he or she is not at liberty to alter the meaning of the text. This is particularly difficult to guarantee as the translation is the translator’s interpretation of the poem, requiring the translator to be an excellent reader to understand what the text means. The humor in narrative poems becomes effective when readers suspend their disbelief in the absurd. The chapter discusses how knowing the role of suspended disbelief in humor can guide actual translation. Finally, the chapter examines the translation of proper names and how it can be challenging given inconsistencies in the theories surrounding it.

Chapter 5 explores the similarity between humor and children’s literature: both are difficult to define. Humor can be defined according to the physical response it generates, its intent and the cognitive processes involved in its appreciation. Nevertheless, similar to children’s literature, the definitions vary greatly among scholars. Three theories of humor are studied: the incongruity theory, the relief theory and the superiority theory. Humor is influenced by culture and the chapter makes this point by citing how culture, for example, determines appropriate humor. The influence of culture on humor appreciation is evident in the children’s responses in the study and further explored in Chapter 8 on interpretation. Humor in children is discussed based on McGhee’s stages of humor development in young children. Particular emphasis is given to the final stage of development to which the participants of the study belong. As McGhee’s assumptions only support the incongruity theory, there is still a need to understand how the relief and superiority theories figure from the perspective of cognitive development of humor in children – this can be the focus of other studies. The chapter moves on to a discussion of humor in children’s literature. Finally, the chapter presents some features of humorous poems for children. One of these is the combination of “tendentious content” and “poetic form” which is said to work hand in hand in creating humor. The study investigates which of the two determines humor in poetry more; the findings can be read in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6 zooms in on the methodology employed in the study. It begins with a section on the interviews conducted with publishers in the Philippines, the results of which are used to substantiate the claims made in the literature review. The activities related to participant recruitment are discussed, including ethical considerations and problems with recruitment. In particular, it discusses how the research adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic, which situates the study in an extraordinary time with a new set of norms. A considerable part of the chapter is devoted to discussing how the materials for the poetry reading sessions have been prepared. As mentioned, two translations have been produced: one focused on form and another focused on content. In translat-

ing for form, the two elements considered are line length/syllable count and rhyme. When it comes to content, the primary consideration in translating the poems is lexical correspondence or the meaning of the texts. The chapter then moves on to the design of the group poetry reading sessions, detailing how the Covid-19 pandemic affected and transformed the study design. The shift to online channels of collecting data as a result of the pandemic has its pros and cons. But if used correctly and planned well, the digital means can have more advantages than disadvantages as observed in the present study. Semi-structured interviews were employed in the study and the chapter expounds on the benefits and drawbacks of this type of data collection. A general evaluation of the poetry reading sessions has been included to aid those who plan to use semi-structured interviews in their work. The chapter concludes with how the sessions have been transcribed and the responses analyzed.

Chapter 7, which presents the results of the poetry reading sessions with children, is organized according to the codes generated in the analysis of responses. There are nine sections in all. These are: general attitudes toward poetry, language preferences in reading, self-assessment of comprehensibility, the preferred mode of input for poetry, shared versus individual reading experiences, the perceived target audience of children's poems, the relatability of content, perception of humor, and the primacy of form or content in determining humor in poems. Direct quotes supplement the findings to provide evidence and more information and context. The chapter also includes some tables to display how certain variables have been cross-tabulated, for instance, the correlation between the poems' funniness ratings and the gender of the reader. The chapter ends with some feedback received from the participants and their parents. Feedback was included to show how poetry reading sessions, despite the online setup as the "new normal", can inspire poetry appreciation among young readers by showing them that poems can be fun. What this points to is that researchers can design and conduct studies that not only work for them but also directly benefit participants. Unfortunately, the potential to make studies valuable for participants is often lost in favor of mere data collection.

Chapter 8 includes an interpretation of the results. It provides a closer look at some of the study's most important findings. The Filipino concept of being one with others is used to explain the participants' responses to the translated poems. The effect of reading funny poems on social relationships, reading widely, and creativity is also discussed. Furthermore, it is shown how funny poems are more complex to process than jokes which have implications for humor competence. Whether it makes a difference when poems can be heard and read simultaneously is offered as a topic for future studies. Finally, the chapter makes a case for the preference for free verse among the children in the study, which contradicts the findings of earlier preference studies.

In Chapter 9, the conclusions of the study are presented. These touch on how children view children's literature, how Filipino books can strengthen bilingual proficiency and how poetry can appeal to children. In addition, the chapter discusses the role of culture and gender in poetry appreciation, which type

of “relatability” is more influential when reading a translation, whether it is content or form that determines humor in translated poems, and the use of group interviews to study children’s humor. The chapter ends with some recommended topics for further study.