Scottish Football Association or Sweet Fanny Adams:
A Study on Language-Bound Humour and Its Translation
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1. Introduction

I love reading humorous books. Some time ago I read a book called *Inconceivable* (Ben Elton 1999), which is a story about a couple who are desperate to have a baby, to conceive, but for some reason or another this does not happen. Why this is, they cannot fathom; it is an inconceivable question they try to get an answer to. I became intrigued by the punning play on the book’s title – the double meaning of inconceivable as “unbelievable” (COED) and “inability to conceive”, a novel meaning for the word – and tried to find a reasonable translation solution for it. This made me interested in the subject of wordplay and its translation, and led in the course of time into the decision to try and find out how to translate wordplay, and consequently it led to this thesis.

Thus, this thesis focuses on the translation of language-bound humour. An instinctive definition of language-bound humour is simply that it is humour whose comic effect is bound within the language with which it is expressed. Clearly this is not good enough, something needs to get clarified further. So, starting with the general concept of humour, I shall firstly try to define what humour is. In this, I have relied much on Kinnunen (1994), Chiaro (1992), and Nash (1985), as well as on some others.

From the definition of humour, I shall proceed and try to define what is language-bound humour. The aim is to produce a taxonomy for the phenomenon of language-bound humour. This taxonomy should help in some way in comprehending the possible variants of language-bound humour.

Traditionally, the term “pun” is often used interchangeably in connection with wordplay, and the dictionary definition for pun is “the humorous use of a word to suggest different meanings” (COED). As I see it, language-bound humour is not merely the usage of a word with two different meanings, but covers also other factors, which are discussed in chapter 3.

The first purpose is, therefore, to give an idea of different types of translation problems under the label language-bound humour. As the name suggests, these problems are somehow intrinsic to language, and as such they should represent different solution mechanisms than, for instance, scientific texts.
The second intention is a linear follow-up to the first one, that is, how to translate these difficult translation problems. The aim is to review various studies made on the translation of wordplay and discover whether there is a common denominator for their translation which could be implemented in order to universalise the different strategies presented. For this, I have relied heavily on two article collections, both of which are edited by Dirk Delabastita (1996, 1997).

The word *universalise* used in the previous paragraph is perhaps a bit too strong an expression for the intentions, but it does signify that the aim is not so much to present how a translation is made from, say, English to Finnish, but rather that the different strategies would be applicable to any source and target language pair. The theoretical discussion should give some tools for the translator of LBH, and I shall provide one practical LBH translation example, which utilises the descriptive discussion on the translation process in chapter 4.

So, in a nutshell, the aim of this study is to (i) compile a language-bound humour taxonomy and define the components therein, (ii) review the translation processes for language-bound humour, and (iii) suggest a set of strategies for LBH translation which would be useful for translators when faced with this kind of translation problem.
2. What is humour?

According to COED humour means “the quality of being amusing or comic”, and further, that to amuse means to “cause … to laugh or smile”. When the definition of laughter is “expressing … amusement” we are dealing with reasoning that is somewhat circular in nature.

In this chapter, I shall discuss various aspects of humour deliberated in the literature. I shall try to identify what the quality of being amusing is, and how is it realised; what means do we have at our disposal to cause laughs and smiles. I shall try to introduce what is potentially funny and when, and what the role of factors such as culture, physiology, and social features is in relation to humour.

2.1. Humour is incongruity

An aspect of humour often mentioned is incongruity (e.g. Kinnunen 1994: 17, Cetola 1988: 245, Fine 1983: 160). This facet of humour deems that something is regarded as out of place or absurd, something that is somehow incompatible with the more “normal” activities in the lives of people. Humour presents us with a world that consists of “the abnormal, the bizarre, and the nonsensical” (Oring 1989: 350).

Naturally, not everything abnormal is humorous. According to Suls (1972), for something to be perceived as humorous, there must first exist a violation of expectations followed by the perception of the code which combines the incompatible components into a sensible whole, while still maintaining the violation of expectancy. From this, we get three steps in the recognition and construction of a humorous incongruity:

1) a violation of expectations
2) perception of a code combining incompatible components
3) preservation of the violation.

These three steps can be clearly seen in the following joke:

“Mummy, mummy I don’t like daddy!”
“Then leave him on the side of your plate and eat your vegetables.”
(Quoted in Chiaro 1992: 14.)
The violation of expectation comes from the fact that in more normal situations a child who does not “like daddy”, finds his actions, not his taste, disagreeable or unsatisfactory (step 1). When we notice the switch in the meaning of the word *like* we perceive the incongruous code (step 2), but we still maintain the knowledge of both possible meanings of the verb, and thus preserve the violation (step 3).

Neither of the lines in the joke above is humorous in itself, but they reconcile into a humorous whole. We have to, in accordance with Kinnunen (1994: 21), regard humour as a whole unit – it cannot be broken into parts. If there were no violation of expectations, the humour in the joke would not strike in a similar manner. If the first line read something like “Mummy, mummy dad tastes funny!”, there would be no, or minimal, violation of further expectations, thus rendering the joke flat.

Similarly, knowing both of the meanings of the crucial item *like* is imperative for the joke to function. If, in this case, the dual meaning eluded us, step 2 would not be fulfilled and therefore the humorous content would be left undiscovered.

The third step, maintaining the violation, comes as a natural extension of the first two steps: once we recognize the incongruity and the item that causes it we are able to view the joke from both directions, the normal and the bizarre. This allows us properly to enjoy the nonsensical nature of the joke and the violation of the expectation it initially sets out to convey.

### 2.2. Humorous Devices

Beside a three-step model for perceiving humour, we might describe humour as having the following two principles:

(i) nothing human is humorous in itself
(ii) all things human can be made humorous (Kinnunen 1994: 24; my translation).

This means that nothing is humorous *per se*, nothing is intrinsically humorous, but that everything nevertheless has potential for humour. A situation where a child sits on a dinner table and eats her father for an evening meal is not innately
humorous (it is sooner a gruesome vision), but with an appropriate method it too can be made humorous.

The device used in many jokes is “the double meaning of an item” (Laurian 1992: 115), which is apparent in the example as well. Nash calls this “dual principle” and “ambiguity” (1985: 7). This study concentrates on the linguistic devices used in humour, or what I call language-bound humour (LBH). Language-bound humour gets its comic value through the use of, or play on, a particular language: the violation of expectations is executed at the level of language rather than of events.

When somebody is described as “nuttier than squirrel shit” (Elton 1999: 40) the violation of expectations is brought about by the second noun phrase, and the code responsible for this, is the linguistically ambiguous item nuttier. This is not a humorous event but comic through language-usage. In the following joke, however, the event of meeting is the source of amusement, not linguistic acrobatics.

“For twenty years my wife and I were blissfully happy.”
“Then what happened?”

This joke is relatively easy to translate into other languages. In later chapters, language-bound humour and its translation are discussed more thoroughly, and language-bound humour is described as a distinctive mechanism of humour compared with the more general type of humour exemplified above.

There are also stylistic resources with which to express humorous effects. Sarcasm and irony are related humorous style concepts in that they both hide the real denotative meaning of an utterance behind a manner of stating. They deviate in their coding of the message: sarcasm uses “pro-code” and irony “mal-code” (Nash 1985: 152–153). In the sarcastic pro-code, the basic denotation remains the same, but is hidden behind an attitude that can be regarded as unfavourable. The mal-code of irony misrepresents the message with an opposition of intended meaning against the denotation. The statement *Tommy is lazy* can be expressed in sarcastic pro-code as *Tommy doesn’t strain himself*, and in ironical mal-code as *Tommy is renowned for his labours.*
Both styles include an element of overstatement, which, together with understatement, are “major principles of comic staging” (Nash 1985: 170). Both under- and overstatement are devices used in humour, since they both violate the expectation of moderation and avoidance of excesses.

In addition to humour derived from linguistic devices and styles, there are situations and elements that can be considered having potential for humour. Some situations needing no linguistic realisation could well be regarded as universally funny. Chiaro (1992: 6) mentions practical jokes as a source for the universally humorous: pulling a chair away from under someone who is just about to sit, is potentially comic in all cultures.

Some categories have higher capability for evoking laughter than others. Elements that have a higher potential for humour than others are, for instance, accidents, insanity, the young and the old, provincials, foreigners, bodily functions, mothers-in-law, politicians, homosexuals, and clerics (Nash 1984: 10, Cohen 1952: 207, Chiaro 1992: 8). In contrast, in certain cultures some matters are regarded as inappropriate subjects for joking, for instance drug addiction is less appropriate than drinking alcohol, as is industrial accident over car crash (Cohen ibid.).

Besides practical humour and elements with higher humour capability, Nash claims that certain logics, sounds, rhythms, etc. have humorous quality. Asking someone “Have you stopped beating your wife?” includes comic logic with a “wicked beauty” (Nash 1985: 109), in that it presupposes maltreatment, and such a question cannot be answered with a monosyllable – even though its yes/no question form requires it – without confirming the underlying presupposition. Words with funny sounds according to Nash (ibid: 126) may include such words as clank and squelch, but, as he acknowledges, only residually. The same line of reasoning applies to humorous rhythms, of which Nash mentions the banal rhythm that “marches exactly, in relentless synchronization, with its governing metre” (ibid: 161): it is only humorous because of its (dis)connections to what is normal, or expected.

As is obvious, there are many issues that can be considered funny or comic, but what connects them all is their deviation from expectations, and that
they are not funny as such, but can be made funny by the violation of expectations.

2.3. Culture of Humour

Appropriate topics of humour vary from culture to culture (see e.g. Chiaro 1992: 5, Kinnunen 1994: 20, Ruch, Ott, Accoce and Bariaud 1991). What is funny in one culture may be inappropriate or serious in another. Ruch et al. conducted a survey in which they evaluated the sense of humour of two groups, the Germans and the French. In their research, they concluded that the Germans appreciated “humor categories of incongruity-resolution and nonsense” and the French appreciated “jokes … characterized by the dominant sexual content” (Ruch et al. 1991: 411).

As Chiaro (1992: 81) states, many jokes are culture-specific to the extent that to a person unfamiliar with the culture in question, a particular joke may seem wholly void of humour. She emphasises the importance of sociocultural information in the appreciation of humour (ibid: 10). If in two European cultures as similar as the French and the German, people appreciate different categories of humour, there must exist an even wider difference between entirely different cultures. Thus, a joke may be regarded as feeble because of the “gaps in the recipient’s world knowledge” (Chiaro 1992: 83).

One factor that plays a large role in determining humour quality is familiarity with the subject matter. This is closely linked to sociocultural competence. Cetola calls this “experience with the topic of humor” (1988: 250) and Laurian defines it as “certain knowledge” that is needed in order to appreciate a joke (1992: 120). Kinnunen expands this notion by saying that to see something as humorous is to judge it thus (1994: 65), hinting that individuals have a choice as regards to what they find amusing.

For example, for the following joke to succeed we need to be aware of certain sociocultural facts:

Did you hear about the Irish centre forward who missed a penalty but scored on the action replay? (Quoted in Nash 1985: 33.)
In Nash’s words, “[t]he cream of the joke is the surreal implication that one could score a goal in this way if only one were ‘Irish’ enough” (Nash 1985: 33, original emphasis). For someone who is blissfully unaware of the implication that “Irishness” has for a specific group, this joke might lead to confusion. Thus, experience with, and certain knowledge of, how this group of people views Irish people as resourceful folk that take advantage of opportunities to advance their cause, is needed in order fully to realise the joke. Or, in other words, those who enjoy this joke judge it as humorous based partly on their distinctive world-knowledge.

Of course it is relatively easy to reach the conclusion that this joke is funny, or meant to be funny, even if one is not a member of the particular culture where the joke originates. We can use our own world-knowledge to deduce the humorous element, and perhaps with a substitution acclimatise it into our own culture, and in doing so, more fully grasp the humour.

An example of such acclimatisation is the nationality joke where one nationality is deemed inferior to others, and its actions are considered substandard. In Britain this underdog nationality is represented by the Irish, in the United States it is often the Poles, in Brazil the Portuguese, and in France the Belgians (Chiaro 1992: 7–8). In Finland, the Swedes usually have the role of the underling.

A Polish Airline passenger plane lands with difficulty on a modern runway just stopping short of disaster. The Polish captain wipes his brow after successfully breaking the plane. ‘Whew!’ he says, ‘that’s the shortest runway I’ve ever seen.’

‘Yes’, says his copilot, looking wonderingly to his left and then to his right, ‘but it sure is wide.’ (Quoted in Chiaro 1992: 8.)

This joke can be transferred between these cultures simply by replacing the Polish with the appropriate nationality.

Judging something as humorous, whether it is because of the culture or because of individual taste, leads inevitably to impartial evaluations. In accordance with this, Kinnunen says that humour is fundamentally subjective in nature (1992: 66). As individuals, people have their own sense of humour and
they hold their own judgement over what is amusing. This subjectivity is, however, not entirely controlled by volition.

2.4. Appreciating Humour

As evidence of the physical effects of humour, Godkewitsch (1976) and Langevin and Day (1972) have concluded in their studies that with the presentation of humour there occur changes in galvanic skin response and heart rate, a type of arousal. Cetola introduces a cognitive-appraisal model of humour and states that in order to appreciate variables beyond “incongruity and physiological arousal” it is necessary to view humour as “emotional experience” (Cetola 1988: 248). He argues that awareness of the emotions involved with humour, together with its context, emphasises the way humour is experienced.

If someone is offended by a joke, and thus regards it as poor, the reason could be that they feel uncomfortable about the subject matter. One plausible explanation offered by Cetola is that while a person is offended by a joke, s/he might lack appropriate self-confidence and feel threatened by it. This feeling of threat might lead to “a negative appraisal of the situation” (Cetola 1988: 254) and consequently interfere with the appreciation of the humour.

Since humour may be considered to be an emotional experience, and emotions involve physiological arousal over which an individual has limited control, the matter of subjectivity is not as straightforward as might be expected. This implies that our sense of humour is linked to our sense of self and that we cannot simply judge and control, as Kinnunen claims, what is funny to us.

Related to the appraisal of emotions is the quality assessment of the joke. There is bad humour as well as good humour, and bad humour is just as visible and tangible as good humour (Kinnunen 1994). Whether humour is successful or not, we are able to identify the intention to amuse.

Originality is a substantial factor in determining the quality of humour. Oring affirms that “[t]he demands for novelty in joke telling are far greater than in tale telling” (1989: 350). Thus, a joke that is known to its hearers will evoke a
lesser amount of visible signs of appreciation of the joke than a joke previously unknown.

Also inability to understand humour renders it incomprehensible. A joke that is explained loses its humorous attribute – an explanation of the joke kills the humour in it (Chiaro 1992: 83).

The inability to identify humorous qualities thus terminates the effects a joke might generate. What effects does comic intercourse arouse, and which essential elements does it have? In his discussion on the question of identifying humour, Kinnunen (1994: 20) asks, what if there are no signals as to what is humorous, what if the only sign of humorous interaction is the effects it elicits? It would follow that whenever someone laughs there must be humour involved. This certainly seems one possible way of discovering humour, since if humour is a stimulation that tickles the laughter reflexes, as Koestler (1974) claims, then it follows that laughter is a natural extension and effect of humour. But humour does not always make us laugh; we might instead merely smile, visibly or inwardly. We can also state that something is “fun” without it being so. We can for instance chuckle appreciably at a painfully banal joke and say: “Now, that was funny”, without really meaning it.

Humour tickles. It causes physiological and physical responses. Humour is identifiable whether successful or not. We can feign appreciation, pretend to be calm about it, and state that something is humorous, even if we personally do not think so. Humour may, or it may not, have its roots in emotions, but what is certain is that its effects on us are as multi-faceted as those of any emotion.

2.5. Humour Is Social Activity

“Psychologists have suspected for a long time that humor somehow is very important in the lives of people. We find laughter and humor occurring almost wherever we find people engaged in social interaction” (McGhee and Goldstein 1983: v).

With regard to this Nash states, “linguistics in the strictest sense may not comprehend the humorous activity of language. Humour is an occurrence in a
“social play” (1985: 12). Although this question of the role of linguistics in humour research is somewhat outdated today, the opposition of linguistic and social elements of humour is still valid.

One of humour’s functions is helping people interact more smoothly in groups (Chapman 1983: 135); humour implies connections between self and others (Fine 1983: 159). Solitary joke-telling rarely provokes laughter.

Humour, then, needs at least two participants in order to carry out its task: the performer and the audience. Since humour can be written, recorded, or taped, these two actors need not co-exist spatio-temporally. The need to amuse does not thus entail tête-à-tête social relationship.

In addition to the performer and the audience, there is another potential social role involved in an act of humour, namely the target. In a simplistic procedure the performer tells a joke to the audience who consequently laughs at the target.

For the performer, the motivation may well lie in a power struggle and he might use the humour device for “reaffirming dominance in a status hierarchy” (Chapman 1983: 135). By exercising his wit the jokester, then, exercises a sense of superiority and challenges the target, and tries to win the audience’s sympathies on his side. The audience, in their part, may show where their allegiances lie by appreciating or dejecting the joke. The role of the target in this scenario is to be a passive means for the performer and the topic of the dialogue.

Humour can also be used to alleviate painful or embarrassing situations. If a seriously ill patient, who acts as a performer in a humorous act, tells a joke whose target is his illness, he might aim at assuaging possible pain or embarrassment the audience might feel.

Unacceptable emotions may be expressed through humour. Some people, especially men in an all-male group, may have difficulty in expressing emotions (Fine 1983: 165). In these situations humour can be used to cloak feelings whose direct expression would potentially discomfit some or all participants.

Joking and teasing also indicate close social contacts between participants. In close relationships, which Fine calls joking relationships, where joking is frequent among group members, the role of humour is to maintain equal status
and indicate intimacy (Fine 1983: 165). In such situations, it is possible to express remarks that from individuals outside the group might provoke conflicts.

Humour is also an instrument used in the communication of matters that are sexual in nature. By using sexual humour the participants of a dialogue can imply willingness to advance the level of intimacy of the relationship. In this sense humour works as a face-saving tactic: if the other party rejects the more intimate contact by not responding to the humour in an appreciative manner, then the self-esteem of the performer does not suffer – it is only their jokes that were discarded (Fine 1983: 167).

Besides the examples discussed here, humour has a vast array of potential situational uses. What is apparent concerning the role of humour in a social context, then, is that it “can be used in numerous ways and has implications for understanding many corners of our social environment” (Fine 1983: 160).

2.6. Humour Does Matter

Humour is incongruity and incompatibility. Verbal humour does not comply with Grice’s conversational maxims, but flouts one or more of them. Humour looks at a scene from at least two discordant viewing points. With the acceptance of humour, we accept various propositions and representations that are abnormal in nature. It could be said that humour in this sense widens our horizons, and allows us to break barriers of, perhaps mundane, conventionality.

Humour does not exist independently, but has to be created; the comic label is earned, not automatically granted. The methods for producing comic discourse are multiple. There are linguistic and stylistic techniques for rendering something humorous. Some elements of life are more prone to jocularity. Furthermore, actions, situations, sounds, even rhymes, can be thought humorous if they deviate from conventions.

Comic beauty, just like conventional beauty, can be said to lie in the eye of the beholder. What is found funny depends on the cultural and individual background and attitudes of a person. A person’s sense of humour mirrors to an extent their whole sense of self.
Humour is also a social and interactional tool. It can be used to hurt, to alleviate, to express the inexpressible, and to build and hold friendships. And much more. I would not hesitate in stating that humour is one of the basic founding blocks of human societies. Humour does matter.
3. What Is Language-Bound Humour?

In this chapter, I shall try to form some kind of outline for the term language-bound humour out of the unsatisfactory “Well, it is humour that is bound by language” definition provided in the introduction. I shall do this by compiling a taxonomical division for different language-bound humour devices, and by explaining and defining their qualities and characteristics.

I review the discussion in the literature on wordplay, and then introduce those instances of language-bound humour that may be categorised as prototypical LBH types, and describe a further category which is named peripheral LBH. I shall exemplify the definitions by explanations and illustrative samples from each category in the provided provisional taxonomy.

3.1. On Wordplay

In section 2.2, I wrote that language-bound humour ”gets its comic value through the use of, or play on, a particular language.” Language-bound humour could well be considered synonymous to wordplay, then. In Chiaro’s words: ”The term wordplay includes every conceivable way in which language is used with the intent to amuse” (1992: 1). This definition makes its fundamental division between verbal and non-verbal humour only, encompassing within wordplay all the comic devices used in verbal humour. This definition does not, to my mind, take into consideration the nature of the play in wordplay which would seem to suggest a certain kind of act performed on the lexemic level.

Other scholars have defined wordplay in slightly more restrictive terms. Delabastita draws a distinction between wordplay and unintentional ambiguities (1996: 131), thus bringing the question of purposefulness into the equation. He goes on to explain that the significance of puns, a type of wordplay, relies on their intention: they are meaningful only when intended to be so (ibid. 131–132). Wordplay according to him is essentially an umbrella term for “the various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more)
linguistic structures with *more or less similar forms* and *more or less different meanings* (ibid. 128, original emphasis). Here Chiaro’s “every conceivable way” has been substituted with “textual phenomena” which exploit the structure of the language, and the “intent to amuse” with a confrontation of two similar elements.

Along the same lines, Alexieva describes wordplay as a “clash of two meanings” (1997: 138, emphasis deleted). Davis expands the notion of wordplay when she describes it as reference to the “systemic operation of language” and a “disambiguating context” (1997: 25). The systemic operation of language means that the denotation is based on rules and semantic features which in themselves have a meaning. Thus, the ambiguous meaning is disambiguated by the context.

Some scholars are reluctant to create an explicit definition for wordplay. Golden, for instance, states that to a degree wordplay is indefinable because it inherently obscures semantic boundaries, and since it does so the issue of boundaries is questionable (1996: 279). Delabastita (1997: 4) admits the difficulties that lie in the definition and classification of wordplay, and says that wordplay should be described and classified as a cline, rather than a structuralist either/or option. When an attempt at a taxonomical classification is made, the taxonomist has to choose between specificity, which brings with it a multiplicity of categories, or manageability, which reduces its descriptive accuracy (Delabastita 1994: 236–237). In my taxonomical effort, I have opted for the manageability of the taxonomy, in order to keep it practical and more easily definable and categorisable.

3.2. **On Language-Bound Humour**

Language-bound humour includes wordplay and all its devices, such as puns, but it includes also other humorous elements, which may, for instance, be called non-wordplay (Delabastita 1997: 6). Non-wordplay in Delabastitan terms stands for such linguistic items as slips of the tongue, potential ambiguities, unintended associations, repetitions, semantic echoes, etc. Distinction can also be drawn between wordplay and soundplay, for instance (ibid. 5). This division is, I think, unnecessary as regards language-bound humour: both words and sounds are
essential to a language. The distinction between essentially intended (puns) and unintended, exceptional cases, for example unintended associations, is also redundant in language-bound humour: if a humorous effect is produced in a language-restricted way, it must belong to the category of LBH. Besides, seemingly unintended rhetorical devices, such as slips of the tongue, can be used with intention to produce a desired comic effect.

In the literature on humour, wordplay is often used to mean punning (e.g. Delabastita 1993, 1996, 1997; Alexieva 1997; Hedrick 1996), which is an additional reason for distinguishing wordplay from language-bound humour, in order to show that LBH is a wider concept than punning. Although for some, the term “language-bound” might evoke negative connotations, I see it as a neutral descriptive term that includes all those instances where language is used in some restrictive way to produce a comic result. In effect, I see it as parallel to Hockett’s (1977) term “poetic joke”, which is a joke that plays with the language itself, and in which the recipient needs to appreciate the way the comic has toyed with language. The translation of poetic jokes is difficult in a way similar to poetry (Chiaro 1992: 15), and this is the crux in language-bound humour as well: it is not only the event itself which is humorous, but also the way the event is portrayed on the level of the language system, and this makes its translation different from other types of humour.

Language-bound humour, then, includes puns, slips of the tongue, play with syntax, play on idioms, words and other structures (e.g. spelling), humorous meaningful names, etc. Although most, if not all, of the various remarks on puns and their definitions are relatively easily applicable to language-bound humour, I shall maintain that keeping the distinction is valid. I shall consider language-bound humour as a superordinate term for various hyponyms that cover the field, and refer to the instances of language-bound humour as LBH.

The term language-bound humour is not a strictly structuralistic either/or option, but rather a continuum, which could include such terms as “language-guided” and “language-restricted”, as in the figure below:
The difference between these various positions in the continuum is sometimes fuzzy and lies principally and essentially in the relative difficulty in translating the various types of language-bound humour. An LBH item that is transferable without great difficulty into one language, but not into another, could be considered language-guided in the first case and language-bound in the second. Additionally, an LBH item that is not transferable into any language is deemed language-restricted. Since this difficulty depends very much on the SL and TL, and their historical and genealogical relationship, this terminological distinction has to be vague, or non-existent, in order for it to be universally applicable. Or, to put it in other words, I shall only use the term language-bound for the whole spectrum in order to avoid any language pair specificity and in order to keep the discussion at a more general level.

Tulusto (2000) complains in her article about the difficulty of adaptation into a foreign culture, and as an example she takes jokes and the difficulty of telling and translating them. Exemplifying her point, she discusses the popular joke among Finnish children “Kumpi ja Kampi tappelivat. Kumpi voitti”, which she translates as “Kumpi and Kampi were fighting. Kumpi won”, and goes on to note that this does not sound too clever. Well, in fact it does not, but obviously Tulusto has not thought this joke through since the word *kumpi*, a pronoun used as a proper noun, can easily be translated into English as *who*, and the second proper noun *kampi* can be translated as *whom*, resulting in “Who and whom were fighting. Who won whom?” This version retains the paronymy and the ambiguity of the original, plus adds an objective noun in the second sentence, resulting, in my opinion, in a valid translation into English of the original joke. In this case, the joke would have to be considered as language-guided, since it is relatively easily translatable into at least one other language. If the target language were changed into, say, Nahuatl, the joke might not travel so easily.
Through the structure of language and writing system, written Chinese jokes contain extensive amounts of polysemy, so much so that it is nearly impossible, even for a native speaker, to distinguish the exact meaning, which is often intended as hugely multifarious (Golden 1996). Jokes of this kind might well be considered language-restricted, i.e. not transferable as such into any other language.

3.3. Culture-Bound Humour

In addition to language-bound humour, there are instances of culture-bound humour, which are at the same time language-bound, such as rhyming slang. Rhyming slang is an English language peculiarity, which does not correspond exactly to wordplay in other languages. Even though it could be argued that rhyming slang is a form of punning (vertical homophony, see section 3.5), I shall treat it separately from puns because of its set form and cultural separation from puns.

According to Leppihalme (1996: 199–202.), allusive wordplay is deeply “culture-specific” communication. Allusive wordplay consists of an allusion, or a “set-phrase” known previously to (at least some) language users, which forms a frame. The frame is then modified so that it undergoes some kind of “linguistic modification” (replacement of a lexical item or alteration of syntax).

An example of allusive wordplay shows a replacement of the first lexical item ‘cry’ to ‘try’, to form a humorous language- and culture-bound wordplay.

*Try the beloved country* (headline, *The Independent* 15.2.1995 quoted in Leppihalme 1996: 205)

The allusion is to the name of a novel by Alan Paton (1948: *Cry, the Beloved Country*), and the initial word has been substituted by a paronym.

This kind of allusive wordplay is beyond the scope of language-bound humour, and has to be assigned into a theoretical group of its own, for example language-bound and culture-specific humour. All humour is culture-specific to a degree, but allusive wordplay is so heavily embedded in, and interlinked to, the source-culture that its comprehension requires not only linguistic skills, but great
cultural knowledge also. Therefore, I shall not deem it belonging to this study on language-bound humour.

3.4. The Functions of Language-Bound Humour

The functions of language-bound humour are numerous. Naturally, the first one to consider is the creation of comic effect. The function of comic effect and the reasons that lie behind it are as multiple as with humour itself: showing one’s witticism, relating with the participant(s), surprise, stimulating the audience, namely what Alexieva (1997: 139) calls our “desire to produce a humorous effect on the people we communicate with”. Other related functions of humour introduced by Zabalbeascoa are “escapist entertainment, social criticism, pedagogical device, moralizing intention” (1996: 244).

In addition to comic effect, Veisbergs (1997: 159) states that the function of such humour is attracting and drawing the reader’s attention to a certain point or feature of the text. McKerras (1994: 7 quoted in de Vries and Verheij 1997: 69) discerns five additional functions: providing linkage, marking a climax, subtly evoking a hidden idea, creating an effective, clever style, and achieving poetic effect. Watson (1984: 245–246 quoted in de Vries and Verheij 1997: 69) adds to the list the following functions: assisting composition, lending authenticity, denoting reversal, showing appearances to be deceptive, and equating two things.

Thus the functions of language-bound humour can be defined as follows:

1. comic effect
2. drawing attention (evoking an idea, denoting reversal, showing deceptive appearance)
3. stylistic features (climax, effective/clever style, poetic effect, composition)
4. linking items (providing linkage, equating two things).

On the whole, the function of language-bound humour can be described as a “communicative strategy” (Delabastita 1997: 1–2) (e.g. stylistic) used in order to achieve a certain effect (e.g. a climax).
3.5. A Classification of Language-Bound Humour

Instead of a hugely complicated taxonomy, I shall opt for manageability in my classification of types of language-bound humour. The taxonomy is in part dividable into distinctive components and partly fuzzy. I have divided the taxonomy into three different sections: puns, other language-bound humour categories, and the category of peripheral language-bound humour. The first two categories are prototypical LBH categories with subsections whose characteristics are relatively easily described. Puns include bilingual puns, and horizontal and vertical punning based on homonymy, homophony, homography, and paronymy. Other language-bound humour categories include play with syntax, wordplay with idioms, meaningful names, graphological play, and slips of the tongue. Peripheral LBH forms a language-specific category which includes all those less universal instances of play on language that are peculiar to a single language, for instance the English rhyming slang. The figure below exemplifies my taxonomy of LBH.

Figure 2: Taxonomy of language-bound humour.

3.6. Puns

The pun is perhaps the central concept in any debate about wordplay. Often pun and wordplay are used more or less interchangeably to mean the same thing. The pun could be said to epitomize the key aspects of language-bound humour, forming its core, which the other devices fall back on and build from. Often what
is said about puns can be said on other language-bound humour devices also, but not necessarily vice versa.

Punning may have been seen as a cheap trick by some people not so long ago, and maybe even today. But in the early 1990’s researchers began to take the pun more seriously and put their scholarly effort in the study of this phenomenon. Such names as Heibert, Delabastita, Oförd, Chiaro, etc. published their work on wordplay and puns (Delabastita 1994: 223–224), and today the study of puns is seen as a “valid” academic activity. Therefore, since the mid-80’s, when Nash wrote his much-quoted *The Language of Humour*, “our time” seems to have become slightly less prejudiced:

> We take punning for a tawdry and facetious thing, one of the less profound forms of humour, but *that is the prejudice of our time*; a pun may be profoundly serious, or charged with pathos. (Nash 1985: 137, emphasis added.)

Pun can be defined as creating “meaningful associations between words that are similar in form but different in meaning” (Crisafulli 1996: 261) or contrasting “linguistic structures with different meanings on the basis of their formal similarity” (Delabastita 1996: 128, emphasis deleted). Pun therefore involves dissimilar meanings linked to similar forms.

### 3.6.1. The Structure of Puns

From the duality of meaning and form, we are able to construct the structure of puns, which is two-fold. Firstly, puns are divided into different types of puns (Gottlieb 1997: 210), based on their formal identity (Delabastita 1996: 128), and secondly, they are divided into vertical and horizontal puns, depending on the presence of their component parts.

The formal identity, whether complete or partial, is expressed through homonymy (lexical elements with the same sound and spelling), homophony (lexical elements with the same sound but different spelling), homography (lexical elements with the same spelling but different sound), and paronymy (lexical items with partially same spelling and sound) (Delabastita 1996: 128; Gottlieb 1997: 210).
In horizontal pun, the lexical elements are present in the text near each other, whereas in vertical pun one element is missing and has to be “triggered into semantic action by contextual constraints” (Delabastita 1996: 129). These characteristics combine into a table, which shows one possible typology of puns (adapted from Delabastita 1996 and Gottlieb 1997, examples in the table from Delabastita 1996: 128, associated lexical elements emphasised).

Table 1: The structure of puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features at play</th>
<th>Homonymy</th>
<th>Homophony</th>
<th>Homography</th>
<th>Paronymy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Carry on dancing carries Carry to the top [article on a dancer named Carry]</td>
<td>Counsel for council home buyers</td>
<td>How the US put US to shame</td>
<td>It’s G.B. for the Beegees [article on pop band]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.2. Linguistic Features of Punning

Punsters have at their disposal various linguistic features, such as the structure of phonology and writing, multiple meanings, morphological structure, etc. (Delabastita 1997: 130). The following is a brief summary of the linguistic features used in the examples above.

Homonymy

Homonyms exploit the limitedness of vocabulary and the multiple meanings for single forms that comes with it. In homonymous punning the lexical item(s) at the centre of the pun may be homonyms (carry as a verb and Carry as a proper noun) or polysemous words whose meanings differ, but which are usually derived from the same word and felt to be related (burning as an adjective and adverb).
**Homophony**

Homophonic punning takes advantage of the fact that – in English at least (see e.g. Delabastita 1997) – there are many unrelated words that share nearly, but not exactly, similar form and are pronounced (at least nearly) identically. Thus *belles* and *bells* can be vertically juxtaposed to produce a punning effect. Noteworthy is that this homophonic vertical pun works only visually, i.e. it has to be read for it to make (punning) sense.

**Homography**

In homographic puns, the punster utilizes the limited set of available letters and the phonemic and morphological structure of words. Thus it is possible to combine the graphemes from the word *message* [mesıdʒ] so that they form a name with two morphemes *MessAge* which is then pronounced either similarly to *message* or in a different manner as [mes eıdʒ]. Likewise, the written abbreviation of the United States *US* [juː es] can be contrasted by capital letter representation of the word *us* [ʌs]. These puns also rely on visual input for their effect.

**Paronymy**

Paronymic puns employ phonological similarity of the words and the morphological structure. The fact that *faith* [feıθ] and *face* [feıs] differ from each other only in their last phoneme allows for this vertical paronymic pun. On the other hand in our horizontal paronymic pun the linguistic feature used is the restructuring of the morphological design of the word G.B. [dʒiː biː], where the order of the two morphemes is reversed and an extra phoneme is added to the end of the word, consequently resulting in the name *Beegees* [biː dʒiːz].
3.6.3. Bilingual Puns

There is another special type of pun, namely the bilingual pun, which involves different languages whose semantic territories (Delabastita 1993) overlap. According to Delabastita

> [t]he possibility of such bilingual wordplay rests on the fact that phonemic systems of different languages may share individual properties (regarding phonemic structure, rules for phoneme distribution, etc.), allowing the punster to take advantage of supralingual formal (phonetic) similarity. This similarity can be, but need not be complete: the fact that it is not may actually be a source of extra fun. But for the pun to be possible it has to be strong enough to bring about the coupling of disparate meanings (1993: 154, original emphasis).

Bilingual punning consequently derives its amusing quality from similar linguistic features as its monolingual equivalent. However, the components of the pun can be more loosely connected. Thus, even though languages are perhaps “profoundly different in … their semantic structure” (Alexieva 1997: 141, emphasis deleted) the rules of bilingual punning are flexible enough to allow for more improbable elements to be associated with each other.

Hedrick has studied bilingual Chicano (Hispanic American) poetry in America, and he compares bilingual punning loosely with translation of certain foreign elements and importing them into the “target” language. He says that the bilingual punster’s task is “to produce a mocking, undermining echo of his/her own language within the dominant [target] language” (Hedrick 1996: 152). This is exemplified in the title of his article *Spik in Glyph?*, which makes fun of the assumed way Hispanics pronounce “speak English” as [spik ɪŋlɪf].

3.7. Other Language-Bound Humour Categories

Besides puns, language-bound humour includes also other types of play on language. Some of these have “pun-like” qualities in that they create ambiguous associations, using similar linguistic features. Wordplay with idioms uses larger structures than conventional punning, which could be described as being
theoretically “word-centered” (Marino 1988: 42). While puns culminate in the semantic ambiguity of one item, an idiom used in punning needs the whole set structure, or part thereof, to function. Spoonerisms also resemble paronymic puns whose morphological structure has undergone a reversal.

In the following, I shall give a brief overview on such phenomena as slips of the tongue, wordplay with idioms, meaningful names, graphological play, and play with syntax, which form a group of “non-pun” language-bound humour devices. The list is not exhaustive, but I hope it will give an idea of the extent of, and the devices used in, language-bound humour.

3.7.1. Slips of the Tongue

Slips of the tongue can be described as “verbal banana skins” (Chiaro 1992: 17) or “lucky lapses” (Nash 1985: 149). All these three labels, i.e. the name of the phenomenon and the two definitions, indicate something accidental and unintended (slip, banana skin, lucky lapse). True enough, they exist in their own right, and have perhaps originated, as blunders, errors, and mistakes. Nash claims these comic utterances are void of design, and Chiaro explains how they are commonly called Freudian slips, whose design is commanded by the subconscious.

In casual speech, where slips of the tongue frequently occur, these kinds of statements may well be accurate. However, when they are used deliberately, as a communicative strategy, both in writing and in speech, they have a design, and their production is controlled by the conscious mind. The difference between a slip and wordplay is, therefore, in the degree of intention (Toury 1997: 273).

I shall briefly introduce three types of slips of the tongue: Spoonerism, Malapropism, and Goldwynism, which have all been named after persons, fictitious or real, who have become famous by uttering such slips.
Spoonerisms

Spoonerisms were named after the Revd William Archibald Spooner (1844–1930) who reportedly often accidentally metathesised two or more words in his utterances, resulting in such sentences as this often quoted example:

You have hissed all my mystery lectures. In fact you have tasted two whole worms and you must leave Oxford this afternoon by the Town Drain (Huxley 1944: quoted in Toury 1997: 272, original emphasis).

Whether or not this example is a genuine slip (Toury, for example, doubts this, because of its complexity), it still remains humorous, and, what is more, humorous in a language-bound manner.

Spoonerism is the transposition of the sounds of two linguistic units. Deliberate Spoonerisms used in wordplay are governed by a set of rules which state that they

- involve well formed units
- may have a stretch of text between the segments
- transpose segments that are nearly always initial phonemes (Toury 1997: 274).

The first rule indicates that both the input and the output forms of the Spoonerism are legitimate, or at least possible, forms. Thus, they do not, for instance, disagree with word formation rules, or form syntactically incongruent clauses. The second rule maintains that the transposed words do not have to be adjacent, but may have even a rather long stretch of text or speech between them.

The third rule can be presented as a simple rewrite rule involving four segments, two transposed segments and two “stationary” segments: 1 2 3 4 → 3 2 1 4. The first string of numbers represents the input, and the second string the output form (Toury 1997: 275). Thus, when the Revd Spooner says “tasted worms” instead of “wasted terms”, the underlying process is as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
[w \ | \ e\text{rst}\text{d}] & \quad [t \ | \ zmz] \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\uparrow & \quad \uparrow \\
[t \ | \ e\text{rst}\text{d}] & \quad [w \ | \ zmz]
\end{align*}
\]
Malapropisms and Goldwynisms

Malapropisms are named after the fictitious character Mrs Malaprop who uses unsuitable words in wrong places. In Malapropism the word that is uttered is similar in sound to another, usually a word of a higher level code (Bolinger 1968: 239–240 quoted in Chiaro 1992: 20), i.e. it appears as if the speaker wished to sound more upper-class and educated than s/he is, failing miserably – and often humorously, as in the following rather nonsensical example.

If I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use of my oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs (quoted in Nash 1985: 149).

Goldwynisms are named after Sam Goldwyn who familiarized English with such statements as include me out and in two words: im-possible (Nash 1984: 149). Here the normal semantic structure is ruptured by the use of surprising lexical choices. In the first example, the word include carries a connotative meaning signifying roughly the same as the preposition in, and using the “opposite” preposition out creates a humorous confusion. The im- prefix in the second example is expressed as if it is a free morpheme (same as not) instead of a bound morpheme.

In the Finnish humorous radio programme Alivaltiosihteerit, humour related to Goldwynisms is exploited extensively, for instance, Äiti aloittaa isänpaiväkun leipomisen hyvissä ajoin jo viime tipassa (Alivaltiosihteerit 2000: 192).

3.7.2. Wordplay with Idioms

Idioms are set combinations of words whose meaning cannot be inferred from the individual words. Instead the whole group of words have a meaning which is recognized through established usage. According to COED idiom expressions are “peculiar to a language”. By definition, then, wordplay that uses idioms is language-bound.

Veisbergs introduces the concept of contextually transformed idioms, which alter the meanings of idioms through structural or semantic transformation.
Structural transformation changes both idiom structure and meaning, while semantic transformation affects only the meaning (1997: 157–158).

In structural transformation, the devices used to modify the idiom are addition, insertion, allusion, ellipsis, and substitution (*ibid*: 158). In addition and insertion, the idiom is adjusted by extra elements, either a modifier (addition) or added lexemes in the idiom itself (insertion). In allusive structural transformation, parts of the idiom are only alluded to, while in ellipsis, a part of the idiom is uttered visibly and the rest is left hanging in the air. In substitution, word(s) in the idiom are substituted with synonymous, antonymous, or paronymous word(s).

Semantic transformational devices are sustained metaphor, zeugma, and dual actualisation. In semantic transformation the idiom is uttered in its entirety, but the interpretation changes (*ibid*: 156–158). In dual actualisation the idiom is interpreted as a string of separate words rather than a combination of words that have a single figurative meaning. In sustained metaphor and zeugma, the figurative meaning of a part of the idiom is carried forward and used (zeugma) or reflected on (metaphor) as a literal unit.

In the following examples the idiom *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* is transformed structurally, and the idiom *to pay a compliment* semantically.

**STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS**
- So priceless a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush [addition]
- A bird in the hand is worth two in the economic bush [insertion]
- Why chase the two birds when one is up for grabs? [allusion]
- A bird in the hand, I thought, and accepted his offer [ellipsis]
- A competent minister in the hand is worth many generals in the bush [substitution]

**SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATIONS**
- They’re all so badly off these days that they can only pay compliments [dual actualisation]
- While she liked paying compliments, she also appreciated whose who knew how to earn them [sustained metaphor]

Though language-bound, not all of the examples are humorous, but this does not mean that, as a device, they could not be used in a humorous manner. The semantic transformations seem to function better as a comic device, perhaps
because they are related to the homonymic pun and are as such more wordplay-like.

3.7.3. Meaningful Names

Proper nouns can also have a significance that is somewhat alike wordplay (Manini 1996: 161). Quite often this significance is realised through, or reflected in, common nouns. Proper nouns are special in that they are mainly used to identify a certain entity, whereas a common noun characterizes the entity. Manini says that “names are marked with a total lack of motivation” (ibid: 162). Thus, normally names do not carry a heavy semantic load.

But in fiction, names can be “semanticized”, so that they characterize as well as identify, Manini calls these meaningful literary names, and he categorises them into four clines: intertextuality, exoticism, morphological structure, and extent of characterization (ibid: 164–166).

Intertextual names are names borrowed from other, usually literarily or historically famous sources, creating a link between the fictional person and the source of the name. Exotic names are used to draw attention to faraway people, places or cultures. They may be either genuinely foreign names or adapted versions of those names.

Manini (ibid: 164) presents an augmented classification suggested by Zimmer (1981: 64) where names are arranged according to how their morphological structure connects or coincides with common nouns:

- transparent names
- transparent composite names
- semi-transparent composite names
- blend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>transparent names</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparent composite names</td>
<td>NP + NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semi-transparent composite names</td>
<td>NP + (secondary NP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blend</td>
<td>modified NP(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(e.g. Death) (e.g. Smallweed) (e.g. Snagsby) (e.g. Fainall).

Transparent names are common nouns, adjectives, or adverbs; transparent composites consist two of these; in semi-transparent composites one element can be considered as “communicatively pertinent” (Manini 1996: 164); and in blends the element(s) is(are) orthographically, phonologically, or morphologically modified or blended.
Names can be used to define characters in some way more fully. In the extent of characterisation, the characters are given a name, which somehow indicates something about the characters or highlights their abilities or qualities. This creates expectation on the personality of the character, and such a name may well fulfil those expectations, or a name can be ironically given to a person whose qualities oppose those of their name (e.g. giving the name “Angel” to an evil character would lead to an inconsistency between the name and the character).

3.7.4. Graphological play

In graphological play, the conventions of the writing system are manipulated in order to produce an effect, humorous or otherwise. Such devices as unconventional typography and spelling, anagrams, palindromes, and acrostics (Nash 1985: 147–149, Chiaro 1992: 28–31) can be used to twist the standard norms.

A typing error in the clause *pubic transport in Naples* (quoted in Chiaro 1992: 18) can be a genuine attempt at humour or a mishap by the author, but in certain jokes or graffiti, spelling can play a crucial role in the realisation of the humour, for instance in some of the “OK jokes” (in Nash’s 1985 terms) spelling is vital:

The king of Siam rules Bangk OK

Yo-yos rule O –

–

K (quoted in Chiaro 1992: 28.)

Here it is vital to experience the joke visually and see how it employs the unconventional graphology for its effect to be achieved.

Anagrams are words whose letters are scrambled in such fashion that they form other meaningful words; the code needs to be broken in order to unravel the underlying meaning. Walter Nash rearranges his name into an anagrammatic piece of humorous play:

Ah, stern law, that I am Walter Nash (Nash 1985: 147).
The segment *ah, stern law* is composed from the letters in the name *Walter Nash*, and in order fully to grasp the comic behind the whole sentence this secret code has to be apprehended and conquered.

Palindromes are words or clauses that can be read either from left to right or vice versa and their basic graphological quality is the same. The classic example in Chiaro (1992: 31) *Was it Eliot’s toilet I saw?* has to be read both ways to appreciate the complexities behind the palindromic play on this sentence.

Acrostics are stretches of text whose first letters in each line or lexeme spell out another, secondary text. An acrostic, especially a longer one, has to be a carefully thought-out construction, which often involves meticulous planning in its execution (Hofstadter 1997: 183). The following corny “poem” hides the first name of its author in an acrostic manner:

```
Put your best effort into what you do
Else you shall find it is no good
Kingdoms have crumbled
Keepers of fortune have stumbled
After work done in shoddy mood.
```

3.7.5. **Play with Syntax**

The ambiguity of meaning can be achieved through the use of syntactical devices, such as prepositions, article usage, etc. In the following joke, the same preposition *with* is used when referring to different entities:

```
Mummy, can I go out to play?
With those holes in your trousers?
No, with the girl next door (quoted in Chiaro 1992: 40).
```

A play on the ambiguity of the specific or generic reference of the indefinite article is seen in the following joke:

```
During a statistics lesson, the teacher says:
‘In Tokyo a man gets run over every five hours.’
```

Naturally, the first example could be regarded as an instance of horizontal homonymic punning, but I think it is more natural to state that it is play with
syntax, because the word *with* seems to have a different function in each case; it does seem more normal to think of their functional meaning as equivalent, rather than stating that the first *with* has a different meaning from the second.

3.8. Peripheral Language-Bound Humour

Language-bound humour is impossible to classify comprehensively into rigid categories with clear boundaries. This attempt at a taxonomical division, so far, is not quite complete. Each language and even language user have their own humorous idiosyncrasies that can be included in the class of “language-bound” in one way or another. The transition from language-bound humour into non-language-bound humour here is fuzzy, and its borders are imprecise.

One way to comprehend the classification is to divide the area into different domains, such as puns, idioms, meaningful names, and the like. This has its advantages in that it clarifies the field into a grid of sorts, where different types of humorous expressions supposedly fall in a neat and orderly way. I am trying to handle the whole field and its translation in a relatively unified manner, and the taxonomical division can only give a rough idea of the concept.

Another way to define what is language-bound is to think the problem through translation, for when translating a certain humorous expression the translator is sensitive to such issues as whether the expression is transferable between languages by a literal translation, by ideational translation where the idea of the expression and not the words therein are translated, or by some other type of translation, or whether a certain type of linguistic adaptation is required. Thus, it emerges that in determining whether an expression is language-bound, its translation is a valuable tool for analysis.

There are instances of wordplay that could be considered language-bound because in translation they lose some or all of their humoristic connotations. These instances are diverse, and they might be restricted into just one or a few languages. For instance, the English rhyming slang could well be deemed such an idiosyncratic category.
In rhyming slang, a word is replaced by a two or three word phrase, which rhymes with the replaced word (Franklyn 1961: 1). Thus, in rhyming slang “butcher’s (hook)” for “a look” (COED), we are dealing with a device that uses the phonetic similarity of the words. This in itself seems language-bound, but there is an element of predictability involved as well. Quite often the meaning of an instance of rhyming slang has become conventional; the speakers of the language know that a certain combination equals an overt meaning. This could render rhyming slang into a synonymous compound word, a “normal” slang of sorts. Consequently, Franklyn differentiates rhyming slang from slang that rhymes, and one of the reasons is its innovative nature (1961: 14), which defies systematic cataloguing of the phenomenon. True, there are instances that have become widely known and have received a dictionary status, but the fact remains that rhyming slang in its “truest” form involves creativity beyond standard discourse.

Another, perhaps universal, language-bound humour element is humour derived from different language varieties and dialects: “[d]ialect is a frequent source of humor” (Francis 1983: 7). The humorous ambiguity is apparent inter-dialectally, as in the following.1

Anyway, to ‘cut to the chase’, as people in film say, I was meeting some people from Above the Line Films. I do beg your pardon, I was meeting with some people from Above the Line Films. One must of course speak American English when moving in film circles these days (sorry, motion picture circles) … (Elton 1999: 139; original italics)

The transition zone between culture-bound and language-bound gets even fuzzier here, and so I would slightly hesitate in declaring this type of humour to be entirely LBH. But, still, this is so painfully evidently play with language that the hesitation is but a slight one.

As the central aspect of humour is incongruity, or incompatibility with the norms, then perhaps one aspect of linguistic humour, or LBH, is linguistic incompatibility in its various forms, beyond the punning discordance between

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1 Here I have emphasised the relevant items with boldface font. I shall use this method of highlighting the features I discuss throughout the rest of the examples as well. Therefore, unless otherwise stated the emphases in the examples are my own.
form and meaning. Here we have such phenomena as humorously incongruent collocations, unusual compounds, strange structures, etc. Connecting “conjugal visit” and “hand” to mean masturbation in *Conjugal visit to hand completed* (Elton 1999: 89), creates an absurdly incongruent image of “relation between husband and hand” instead of “relation between husband and wife” (*conjugal*: COED). Translating it with equally disharmonious *Operaatio nyrkkikyllikki* (Elton 2000: 85), with its unusual, even bizarre, compound tied together with a word reserved for a register more military in style, relates this absurd incongruence very well. Again, where, if anywhere, in the LBH continuum these types of humorous elements should be assigned, is not entirely clear.

Though I am unable to fully define the category of peripheral LBH, there are some remarks to be made even from these few examples. Firstly, ambiguity is the essence of peripheral language-bound humour. This ambiguity is, furthermore, realised primarily through the use of linguistic elements. The ambiguity may occur between surface form and meaning or between what is expected linguistic “behaviour” and occurrence of unexpected, incongruous or even absurd, linguistic performance. Secondly, the instances involve creativity. Just as in humour generally, the comic label is earned, not automatically granted. The mere disregarding of linguistic norms does not trigger the comic capability of language, and this capability is as subjective as humour itself as a general concept. Thirdly, as ever, the translation of these instances of LBH involves more than mere literal rendering of the words, something that needs a language-bound approach to their translation.

### 3.9. Summary of the Features of Language-Bound Humour

Just like any humour, language-bound humour is based on incongruity and incompatibility. If humour is incongruity and incompatibility, then language-bound humour is linguistic incongruity and linguistic incompatibility. This mismatch is apparent in two levels, primarily on the level of language and, secondarily, on the level of the two discordant viewpoints of humorous act.
Language-bound humour is not a text type or a complete text, but normally a certain problematic feature within a text. Naturally it may be a recurrent feature, which occurs throughout the text, as for instance in the case of meaningful names.

What is important in language-bound humour is its purposefulness: the comic producing instances of language-bound humour does so for a reason and with careful consideration. The function of language-bound humour can roughly be said to represent four categories: comic effect, drawing attention, stylistic feature, and linking items.

As is apparent from my attempt at classification, language-bound humour is not a simple concept with easily definable features, but a complex body of different phenomena that share together linguistic ambiguity and the question of transferability. The question of transferability is dependent on the linguistic ambiguity in that the translation of language-bound humour items is usually not a matter of simply replacing the lexemes with equivalent lexemes in another language.

Perhaps one of the better ways to define and recognise an item of language-bound humour article would then be through translation: language-bound humour is humorous play on the level of a certain language, and it is not directly translatable into another language by a simple substitution procedure.

This lack of immediate translation solutions is what makes the subject of LBH translation intriguing. Since translators cannot rely on the dictionary definitions of words included in the translational problem, what other tools can they employ? What procedures and processes are there at translators’ disposal so that they can overcome the relatively difficult task of transferring an LBH from one language to another? For me, these types of translation problems are one of the core reasons why I consider translating to be a form of art, rather than something people do with words. I hope to give some answers to the questions above in the following chapter.
4. Translating Language-Bound Humour

In this chapter, I start by discussing some of the central concepts in translation theory and their relation to language-bound humour. These are the core concepts of translation theory which surface in any discussion on translation, and I shall try to draw parallels between these central concepts in general and their relation to LBH in particular.

I also aim at providing a set of strategies for the translation of LBH. The intention is not to provide a formulaic set of linguistic procedures with which to achieve a successful result. In this sense the strategies discussed in this section do not offer clear-cut linguistic rules with which to mechanically replace one item with another. The purpose is not to state, for instance, that transposing noun X into adjective Y in a certain LBH category results in an effective translation. The strategies presented here mostly affect the ideational content of the translated item, not the linguistic form. Still, some attention is paid to the form, or the taxonomical category, of the LBH.

I shall address the translation process itself and various translation strategies at the translator’s disposal. As illustrative examples for various strategies and situations material from the following novels and their translations have been used:

- Ben Elton: *Inconceivable* (IC), trans. *Vauvahorkka* (VH)
- Joseph Heller *Closing Time* (CT), trans. *Lopun ajat* (LA)
- Irvine Welsh: *Filth* (FI), trans. *Paska* (PA)

These are contemporary humorous novels published in 1994–1999 and their Finnish translations, and as such perhaps reflect one view on humour today in the English speaking community. The examples are chosen to suit each occasion according to my sense of humour and of linguistic language-boundedness. Finally, I shall take up one LBH problem and discuss the practical implementation of the theoretical discussion in the translation process.
4.1. Language-Bound Humour and the Supermemes of Translation

Chesterman (1997) introduces the concepts of modern translation theory through memes and memetic thinking. He has adapted the idea of a meme from the socio-biology of Richard Dawkins (1976).

According to Chesterman a meme is “an idea that spreads” (1997: 2). Meme, as an idea, is a metaphor parallel to a gene: in the same way as successful genes survive in biology, successful memes, or ideas, survive in sociocultural environment. A culture consists of a “population of memes “ (ibid. 7) in metaphorically much the same way as a living organism consists of a population of genes.

In order for the memes to spread beyond their immediate cultural context into other cultures, their contents need to be converted into the language of these cultures. This transmission is achieved through translation, and Chesterman defines translations as “survival machines for memes” (ibid.). The metaphor is useful, although I think an idea may also survive monolingually in a restricted cultural sphere, thus, strictly speaking, invalidating the notion of a “survival machine” – survival does not imply growth. So, instead of a survival machine, translation could be considered acting as a potential growth-provoking stimulant for memes.

Memes cover the entire human field of thought, and, by definition, they also cover translation theory and LBH. Different ideas have been valid in the discussion on translation theory through the ages, and in the present-day there exist various central theoretical concepts, which Chesterman calls supermemes. These five supermemes are

- source-target
- equivalence
- untranslatability
- free vs. literal translation
- all writing is translating (Chesterman 1997: 7–14).
Below I shall briefly outline each of the supermemes, and their conceptual content according to Chesterman, as well as views on their relationship with the general concept of the translation of language-bound humour.

These five central concepts are not wholly compatible, nor are they entirely incompatible. The source-target meme gives a useful framework for a discussion of the relation between the original text from which a translation is made and the end-result of the translational act. This idea is useful for instance in translation criticism and comparative translation studies, and helps to define the notion of transition of an idea from one language to another. Although the idea of equivalence is perhaps not entirely justified in its purest form, it still gives a structural framework for translators with which to at least realise the various possibilities for translation, in one form or another. The untranslatability meme stresses, in my opinion, the difference between different language systems, and is useful in that while accentuating the impossibility of langue A to langue B transfer, it empowers the translator to perform parole A to parole B transfers. The debate on free-literal translation gives rise to discussion on different translation methods, even though as a normative rule-inducing system it seems too rigid. The notion of all writing being translating is a functional way of thinking that allows the translator to break a normative set of mind, and concentrate on the result of the transference instead of agonizing, perhaps unconstructively, over the translational act at a micro level, and concentrate more on the macro level of text production.

The Source-Target Supermeme

The idea at the core of source-target supermeme is that a translation is movement from source text to target text so that from A we get B (Chesterman 1997: 8). However, a notion of movement implies that something leaves from A and arrives at B, but when translating the A into B, both the point of departure and the goal remain. Therefore it would be more fruitful to think of translation as, instead of a journey, a propagation – the source text undergoes an evolution through the novel readership (ibid.). Visually, I understand this meme as follows:
Movement $A \rightarrow B$

Extension $A \rightarrow B$

The idea is similar to a cell-based organism growing by dividing into two. The idea of extension applies to the translation of language-bound humour as well. There first exists an LBH item, and that item is then transferred into the target language in some manner, spreading the LBH “meme”. It is, however, questionable whether the idea contained within the meme is the same in the TT as in ST, especially in those cases where the translator has had to modify the LBH. But this matter is more a question of equivalence, than source vs. target debate.

The Equivalence Supermeme

Equivalence is and has always been a much-debated concept in translation theory (cf. Chesterman 1997: 9–10). Equivalence indicates that the target text is the same as source text. What exactly is meant by sameness is a source of incessant discussion. Naturally, an absolute sameness of the translation is impossible, since that would mean that the source and the target text would be identical, i.e. there would be no translation. Analogously with the visual metaphor of extension $A \rightarrow B$, I see an absolute equivalence looking like this:

Herein, there is no propagation, only a circulated text. There have been attempts to divide equivalence into subtypes other than a binary either/or division. Many labels have been used to distinguish “formal” and “dynamic” equivalence (in Nida’s 1964 terms), depending on whether the translation aims at reproducing the same form and meaning (formal) or the same effect (dynamic) in the TT (Chesterman 1997: 9). The equivalence meme is fading in importance with the realisation that there is no absolute comparative sameness between texts. Equivalence in the translation of language-bound humour items is even more debatable than in some other text types.
When discussing wordplay and equivalence, it is readily apparent that the traditional one-to-one relationship, or formal equivalence, between the ST and the TT is usually impossible, not least because “if the translation did reproduce the exact semantic, phonic, formal, contextual, etc. aspects of the source, there would be only one language” (Davis 1997: 39, original emphasis).

Delabastita discusses the translation of wordplay with various methods, such as translating an ST pun by “more or less” similar wordplay in the TT, by “a non-punning phrase”, by some other “rhetorical device”, etc., and goes on to say that for those who endorse untranslatability of wordplay these kind of devices fail to meet the “requirements of translation equivalence” (1997: 134), and are thus inadequate as translations and lack equivalence. I wholly agree with Delabastita’s view that a translation of wordplay with an appropriate method does indeed constitute as “equivalent”, even though not always identical.

The Untranslatability Supermeme

Whereas equivalence can denote a perfect translation, an unattainable carbon copy of the original, the concept of untranslatability declares that all translation is unachievable. Because the extension $A \rightarrow B$ always produces $B$ instead of $A$, and the result is dissimilar, a translation is not seen as possible. This only means that nothing is translatable in an exact manner, but does not rule out the possibility of a non-perfect translation. The nature of language is vague, the use of words is elastic, and linguistic communication is always imprecise (unlike mathematic communication), and this is what makes translation possible. Structurally speaking a language system, langue, is untranslatable, but language use, parole, is translatable (see Chesterman 1997: 11), or, as I would picture it:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Langue} & \quad A \rightarrow B \\
\text{Parole} & \quad A \rightarrow B
\end{align*}
\]

I think that the whole question of whether language-bound humour is translatable gets its answer from this division between langue and parole, i.e. since parole is
translatable and instances of language-bound humour are instances of parole, their translation is attainable; the question that remains is how, and this is something I hope to be able to clarify in sub-section 4.4.

The question of translatability of wordplay in general, and consequently of LBH in particular, has been a hot topic of discussion in the literature. Most, if not all, contemporary scholars on wordplay agree that wordplay can be translated. Their opinions on the matter differ mostly in how much they hedge their statements, resulting in various degrees of definiteness of opinion. The statement by de Vries and Verheij that “[t]he claim by House (1973: 167) and many others that wordplay cannot be translated at all seems too strong” (1997: 68), clearly shows this. The operative thought is that the opponents of wordplay translation deny any kind of translation of wordplay, but we do have various methods at our disposal to deal with wordplay translation. As an extreme example, if we accept, for instance, omission of information as a valid translation strategy (see Chesterman 1997: 109), anything can be translated paradoxically by not translating it at all. What the opponents of translatability of wordplay seem to be concerned with most is the exact translation, which, taking into account the ambiguous nature of wordplay, is indeed often not possible.

One factor that has to be taken into account in the translation of wordplay between languages is the linguistic distance between them. Gottlieb states emphatically that the translation of wordplay is indeed possible, but hedges his forceful statement by adding: “between two related speech communities, at least” (1997: 226). This is on par with Davis’ view that “translation is always relative, and relative translation is always possible” (1997: 33). Golden concludes his study on the translation of ancient Chinese into Indo-European languages by saying that it might be the case that when translating between these wholly unrelated languages, it is not possible to “make the two horizons [of understanding] overlap”, but that it is feasible to produce a “translation that maintains and transmits as many of those multiple meanings … as possible” (1997: 300).

Perhaps the best way to solve the theoretical problem of untranslatability of LBH is to define the translation of wordplay in such a way as to leave room for both arguments which are correct depending on one’s view on translation. We can
say that “wordplay (certain types of it more than others) tends to resist (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on many circumstances) certain kinds of translation” (Delabastita 1997: 10, original emphasis). In this way, we may claim that a translation of item A is not possible with strategy B, but also that the translation of item C is perhaps possible with strategy D. This leaves, unfortunately or fortunately, room for much speculation and debate, this study also forming a part of this discussion.

The Free vs. Literal Translation Supermeme

In the discussion on free vs. literal translation, Chesterman takes up a definition by Barkhudarov (1993) in which the question of literal against free translation is seen as a range consisting of units of translation: smaller units indicate more literal, and larger units more free translation. I see this as a continuum:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>morpheme</th>
<th>word</th>
<th>phrase</th>
<th>clause</th>
<th>sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Literal translation ......................................................... Free translation

This is a tidy depiction of the translation continuum, but perhaps if the minimal and maximal range limits were expanded from a phoneme (e.g. in translation of spoken texts) to a whole text, the portrayal would be more comprehensive. Depending on the scholar, the opinions on this matter vary from advocating a strict word-by-word translation to preferring a global translation strategy with a considerable amount of freedom of choice (cf. Chesterman 1997: 12–13). The translation of language-bound humour usually, by nature, restricts word-by-word translation, and so I would suggest that the methods and strategies for translating such problems are normally more at the free translation end of the scale than at the literal translation end, thus in fact conflicting with the idea that smaller units would indicate a more literal translation strategy.
The All Writing Is Translating Supermeme

The idea that all writing is translating is almost an opposite idea to the concept of untranslatability. Whereas untranslatability indicates the impossibility of translation, the concept of all writing being translating stresses the fact that translation is not only possible, but also an everyday notion where texts are concerned. Whenever we interpret texts, we rephrase them in our minds, so that we understand them. This meme surfaces also in postmodern thinking on intertextuality, a notion which states that

> no texts are original, they are all derivative from other texts, parasitical upon them; writers do not create their own texts but borrow and combine elements from others, linking up in the global textual web. Our words are not ours; they have been used before, and our own use is inevitably tainted by their previous usage … There are no “originals”; all we *can* do is translate (Chesterman 1997: 13–14, original emphasis).

This is a rather extreme example, but one which highlights the difficulty of defining precisely what translating is. This meme is perhaps not as central as some of the above when discussing the translation of language-bound humour, but it does accentuate the fact that translating such problematic items is possible and achievable.

4.2. Translation Strategies

The practical application of views or opinions on translation requires certain strategies. Strategy can be defined simply as “a way of doing something” (Chesterman 1997: 88), or more precisely in translation, as a way of “overcoming temporary hitches in the translation process” (*ibid.* 90). A translation strategy may either be a conscious cognitive effort or something the translator is mostly unaware of.

It may be considered that there are two types of strategies, global and local (e.g. Jääskeläinen 1993: 115–116; following Séguinot 1989). The first one concerns the overall text, and involves text type, overall translation method (e.g. free vs. literal), decisions on the importance of skopos and effect, etc., or,
“translator’s general principles and preferred modes of action” (Jääskeläinen 1993: 116). Local translation strategies affect more specific translation problems at the level of word, structure and idea. It could be said that global strategies affect the macro level and the local strategies the micro level of the text.

This study aims at offering solutions to local, micro level, translation problems, and is thus problem centred. Hopefully this section has made it clear that in the discussion of translating language-bound humour the question of whether an item is translatable or not, is less valid than the question of how to translate, or, rather, what local strategies do translators have at their disposal when confronted with a problem that needs a solution.

4.3. Translation Process

The translation process for language-bound humour involves recognising the LBH, analysing it, and translating it. Although these may well require minimal or no conscious effort, I shall discuss factors affecting recognition, matters to consider when analysing, and examine eight different strategies suggested by scholars in the literature, eventually presenting a set of strategies of my own. I shall illustrate various points with examples from the selected material.

4.3.1. Recognition

The question of recognition is not an altogether minor factor when discussing the translation of LBH. In her paper on allusive wordplay, Leppihalme stresses this point when she says, “part of the practical problem of translating allusive wordplay is an inability to identify the point as worth special attention in the first place” (1996: 207). Allusive wordplay is culture-specific and thus poses recognition problems more often than language-bound wordplay, but even the recognition of LBH is not always as straightforward as might be presumed. The source language is very often not the translator’s mother tongue and, hence, normally the translator’s competence is secondary to that of the target language, and therefore certain idiosyncratic, unusual, or otherwise hidden jokes in any text might be left unnoticed.
Recognition is an essential part of the whole translation process of LBH. If translators fail to see the wordplay in question, they cannot even begin to contemplate various translation strategies and approaches for wordplay translation. Usually in a long text the failure to notice single instances of wordplay does not render the text unreadable, but extensive inability to spot the jokes will result in their translation in a manner more suitable for non-wordplay items.

In the following, the translator has missed the acrostic joke and translated the item literally. The result is a slightly perplexing statement, since the idea is that the criminals who are questioned do not reveal anything at all, but in the Finnish version the idea is reversed, i.e. that they would “give away” anyone.

They’re veterans of questioning. They’ll give away Scottish Football Association, and they’ll have a smart-arsed lawyer like Conrad Donaldson doon here straight away. (FI: 186)

Ne ovat rutinoituneita kuulusteltavia. Ne ilmiantavat vaikka Skotlannin jalkapalloliiton ja niillä on tukenaan viisastelevia hienoperselakimiehiä kuten Conrad Donaldson. (PA: 191)

The acrostics in the bold spells SFA (i.e. the euphemistic “sweet Fanny Adams”), and had the translator spotted this, he could have proceeded with another translation method which would have conveyed the idea in the original in a more fruitful manner.

Naturally, sometimes it is difficult to say whether a particular pun is incidental, and thus, according to Delabastita, not “communicatively significant” (1996: 131). In the following example, there is a vertical homophonic pun on the word *diary* with the coinciding non-visible homophonic word being *diarrhoea*. Here the indication for punning is signalled by the unusual use of *diary* as a verb.

If you’re fool enough to order anything ‘steeped’ in a sauce or containing the words ‘jus’, ‘julienne’ or ‘trio’ you might as well *diary* in a half an hour in the bog for the afternoon while you are at it. (IC: 139)

Jos on tarpeeksi hölmö tilataakseen jotain kastikkeessa haudutettua tai jos listassa mainitaan sanat ”jus”, ”julienne” tai ”trio”, on parasta varata kalenterista saman tien iltapäiväksi puoli tuntia vessassa istumista varten. (VH: 133)
Whether or not the translator has recognised the punning element here, he has opted for the literal translation of the item and not tried any replacement method, thus losing the effect – unintended or intended – of the wordplay.

Unusual effects, textual or otherwise, may encumber the recognition process. In the next passage, the translator has failed to recognize the rhyming slang *Sherman Tank* (i.e. ‘wank’), and has translated it with a Finnish humorous compound word with one of the components being a meronym of *tank* (i.e. ‘telaketju’). The topic of the preceding passage in the novel has been an act of masturbation (“I stare at my handiwork” points to that passage) and not the female colleague of the main character (“KAREN FULTON”), which should have been enough of a clue for the recognition process. But the special extratextual feature of the illusion of a talking tapeworm (here an approximation) inserted in between the passages has hampered the flow of the text, making the reading slightly more challenging. This further emphasises, too, the importance of the translator as a primary reader of the initial message.
I cross out KAREN FULTON and write BOB TOAL in its place. I stare at my handiwork for a bit and get a breathless fit of the giggles which immobilises me as the tears stream down my face.

I go outside and wash my hands but I can’t get my nails properly clean. I look at my jaw in the mirror and rub the bristle. I need a good shave

Simple pleasures. The fan heater under my desk is blowing out hot air against my leg as I recover from that Sherman Tank with a strong cup of coffee and a Kit Kat … (FI: 108–109)

Vedän KAREN FULTONIN yli viivan ja kirjoitan tilalle BOB TOAL. Tuijotan kätteni jälkiä hetken ja saan sellaisen kikatuskohtauksen, että menen täysin hervottomaksi ja kyyneleet nousevat silmiin.

Lähden pesemään käsiäni, mutta en saa kynsilaulustoa kunnolla puhtaaksi. Katson peilistä leukaperiäni ja hieron sänkeä. Parta pitäisi ajaa ku

Elämän yksinkertaisia iloja. Lämminilmapuhallin hurisee työpöydän alla, kun yritän toipua sen telakettujfeministin hyökkäyksestä kupillisella vahvaa kahvia, Kit Katilla … (PA: 115–116)
As is apparent from these few examples, the recognition of a LBH is not always as straightforward as the recognition, say, of jokes. The wordplay may be “hard to get”, it may be very subtle, and perhaps even unintended, or there may be elements in the text itself that make the recognition harder. What is needed is alertness and good language skills, but if the text type is humorous, as is the case in the examples above, then the translator should be careful to notice such signs as:

- does the text make sense? is it coherent?
- are there any unusual words used (e.g. above “to diary”)?
- are there any apparent LBH devices used (e.g. the rhyming slang “Sherman Tank” in the previous example, possible acrostics)?

If some such inconsistency with the more “normal” text is noticed, then there is the possibility of LBH, and with careful interpretation it may be recognized. Then the translator may proceed to the next step of analysing the LBH.

4.3.2. Analysis

When an LBH item has been recognised, the translator needs to analyse it in order to establish its structure and possible realisations in the target text. The first step is to define the function of that particular LBH (see sub-section 3.4). Different types of LBH might have different functions, for instance meaningful names may have a function of characterization or a function of comic effect. In the following, the function of the name is to be a part of a horizontal paronymic pun:

“My name is Louie, not screwy.” (CT: 137)

The translator has changed the name from its informal form (Louie) into the form from which it is derived (Lewis) and thus succeeded well in interpreting the function of the name in this case as an element in a comic interaction, and in doing so he has been able to reproduce the horizontal paronymic pun:

– Minä olen Lewis, enkä idis. (LA: 148)

Had the purpose of the name here been providing intertextual linkage with a hypothetical “Louie” in another text or situation, thus creating continuity between
these two instances, the translator might well have been forced to consider another approach to the translation of this LBH.

Normally, in addition to the comic effect, the LBH has a communicative function without which the flow of the text is interrupted or its comprehension diminished. However, in some cases the communicative function is minimal, and does not interrupt the flow or reduce the reader’s ability to comprehend the text as a whole. Thus in some cases omission of an LBH may well be a suitable translation strategy.

The first private eye – he took for granted the eye was private – had trailed him right into the hospital … (CT: 25–26)

Ensimmäinen oli seurannut häntä aina sairaalaan asti … (LA: 13)

In this case, the inserted aside does not add to the comprehension of the passage, but acts as a humorous digression in the form of horizontal homonymic pun, which the translator has left out.

Sometimes LBH requires certain knowledge from the reader, making it accessible only to a certain part of the text’s audience, leaving others out. One such case is the following bilingual pun:

By a curious coincidence I’d ordered Oeufs Benedict to begin my meal. Her eggs [i.e. ovaries] were ready at exactly the same time as mine. (IC: 26)

Sattuman oikusta olin tilannut munia Benedict alkuruoaksi. Lucyn muna kypsyi samaan aikaan kuin minun. (VH: 24)

Here the translator has had to decide whether to make the slightly hidden bilingual pun into explicit one, thus denying the reader of the TT the joy of realising the joke. In this case, the translator has had to analyse whether the term in the original would have much more limited readership than that of the original. In the English speaking world, the French term might be more readily recognisable by the average reader through different emphasis on the French language in schools, thereby leading the translator into “monolingualising” the term. On the other hand, had the translator left the item as it is in French, the pleasure for those who nevertheless recognise the joke would have increased.
Some items of LBH might have to be analysed at the morpheme level, as is the case in the following vertical paronymic pun:

I managed to just about sustain a sort of semi-half-master until achieving a lacklustre orgasm. More of a boregasm really. (IC: 29)

Onnistuin viimein saamaan aikaan jonkinlaisen puolikovan esityksen ja innottoman orgasmin. Pikemminkin dorgasmin. (VH: 26)

The pun has to be brought back to the morphemic level by splitting it into its two component parts and translating them individually:

\[
\text{bore} + \text{orgasm} \rightarrow \text{boregasm} \\
\text{dorka} + \text{orgasmi} \rightarrow \text{dorgasmi}
\]

Sometimes it is not clear what the LBH really means. In the next piece of graphological play, the writing is supposed to represent someone writing while drunk:

Argor es wororrisle. Am olanpassit. Face collapsin. (BJD: 146)

Here the translator cannot easily resort to morphological analysis since the words do not have a normal morphological structure. The function of this LBH is most likely to be comic, and the knowledge required for interpretation of this kind of language is not available in textbooks. The translation shows how the translator has analysed for instance the term olanpassit as mennythä naista, presumably from the supposed final two words, past it. The translation captures the image of drunkenness, but this time an image more suitable perhaps for speech than writing:

Jeshush että thämä on khamalaa. Olen mennythä naista. Naamani on rhupshahthamasha. (BJES: 181)

It may well be the case with some items of LBH that in the analysis one must be aware of different language types or dialects. In the following, knowing that the pronunciation in one variety of Scots English of the word arse is something approximating erse, is important both in the recognition and in the analysis of the rhyming slang chorus and verse as ‘arse’:
Christ knows how I’d’ve got it up her chorus and verse. (FI: 150)

Tosin kesti ikuisuuden saada homma toimimaan niinkin, luoja tietää kuinka olisin onnistunut äheltämään vehkeen tuhkaluukusta sisään. (PA: 156)

Note also that the original form or category of the LBH (rhyming slang) is changed in translation (slang word). This is natural as Finnish lacks this LBH device.

The analysis stage could perhaps be thought of as something like understanding the LBH in order to be able to decide on the translation method. In analysing, the translator gets to know the LBH, its function and structure, and its ST and TT cultural implications. I am not implying that this is a wholly conscious process, but that it may well be made into conscious effort, which could aid in the translation process.

In the analysis, the following aspects should be taken into consideration:

- function of the LBH
  - does the LBH have more functions than one?
  - what is the primary function?
- special knowledge
  - what knowledge does the translator need?
  - what knowledge does the TT reader need?
- form
  - can the LBH be said to belong to a definable category?
    - is there a similar LBH category in the TT?
  - can the LBH be reduced to its component parts and further analysed?

4.3.3. Translation

The recognition and analysis processes may be, as I stated, unconscious efforts on the translator’s part, but translation is a conscious act which needs cognitive effort. The act is, however, not necessarily a fully conscious problem setting and solving act, but may also be performed without constantly inspecting the text carefully and then formulating a solution to a problem. But when a translator is faced with a passage or an item in the text for which no immediate solution is forthcoming, then some kind of deductive process does occur. I do not believe in the opinion put forward by Florin that the translation of wordplay “depends on
sudden inspiration” (Florin 1983: 176, quoted in Veisbergs 1997: 163, translation by Veisbergs) without any achievable help from any types of “formulae or systems” (ibid.). This would mean that the only way to translate wordplay is to sit and wait for an inspiration.

I concur with Veisbergs who states that systematic corpus based studies will help to characterise strategies translators have used and may use in future (1997: 163). Various studies have been conducted on different methods used by translators when translating wordplay, and my intention is not so much trying to re-invent the wheel, so to speak, but to see whether I can use the material from previous studies for my purposes in this thesis. Furthermore, I shall give an example on the translation process in sub-section 4.5.

In her study on the translation of feminist wordplay, von Flotow (1997: 55) quotes the preface of the German translation of the feminist novel *Gyn/Ecology* by Mary Daly, translated by Erika Wisselinck, where the translator has isolated three possible ways to translate the wide range of feminist puns in the book:

- changing the pun to alliteration or image in which the reader might recognize idioms and images from her own context.
- literal translation of the pun, losing the wordplay.
- explaining the pun in a footnote (Daly 1978: 9, quoted in von Flotow 1997: 55).

In this case, the array of translation methods seems very limited, but it must be taken into account that most of the impressive assortment of puns in the book have many functions. The puns are not only there to be witty and impressive, although that is what they most certainly are, but they are there to point out how the language functions in a male-oriented way. Thus, the translation of *the-rapist*, *bore-o-cracy*, or indeed the name of the book, *Gyn/Ecology*, all of which point out certain discrepancies in modern society, is restricted in a way that wordplay or LBH that has no such agendas rarely is.

Many translation strategies have been formulated for the translation of different kinds of wordplay in different text types, and even in different media. I have composed a table from eight different sources, which present various approaches into the translation of wordplay. I have tried to set them in the table in such a way as to show the relationship between the various strategies, for instance

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so that the strategy which Delabastita calls “Editorial Techniques” appears in the same row as functionally similar strategies by Veisbergs and Wisselinck, i.e. “Metalingual Comment” and “Explanation”, respectively. The first row indicates whose categorisation follows in the column and for what type of wordplay s/he has composed the set of strategies.

Table 2: Overview of translation strategies presented in eight previous studies on wordplay translation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puns</td>
<td>Idioms</td>
<td>Bible Wordplay</td>
<td>Wordplay</td>
<td>Meaningful names</td>
<td>Shakespeare’s Puns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pun</td>
<td>– more or less similar TL pun</td>
<td>Equivalent Idiom – same idiom in both ST &amp; TT</td>
<td>Analogue Idiom – similar idiom, but formally different</td>
<td>Extension – idiom made similar by addition of elements</td>
<td>Substitution – different idiom in the TT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free Translation</td>
<td>Free Style</td>
<td>Transcribed</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appropriate alliterations or images in TL which mirror the pun</td>
<td>– employing all possible stylistic levels in TL</td>
<td>– spelling adapted to TL</td>
<td>– to local setting, maintaining humorous effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Pun</td>
<td>Loan Translation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– both senses of ambiguity</td>
<td>– translate idiom’s components</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Pun</td>
<td>– one sense of ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>Omission</td>
<td></td>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– omission</td>
<td>– total omission, or literal rendering</td>
<td>– change type of wordplay or its location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pun ST = Pun TT</td>
<td>Literal Translation</td>
<td>– lose play on words</td>
<td>Transliteration – literal translation of the words</td>
<td>Ignore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– literal rendering of the pun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rendered Verbatim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Pun → Pun</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Not Rendered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– compensation from existing text</td>
<td>– insertion of a special textual device at different place</td>
<td>– in adjacent text fragment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero → Pun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compensation, addition of new text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Metalingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques</td>
<td>Comment – footnotes – foreword – etc.</td>
<td>Explination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Gottlieb (1997) |                  |                          |                          |                |
| Wordplay in subtitling |                  |                          |                          |                |
Next, I shall point out some observations deduced from the table, and then try to formulate a set of strategies based on the strategies presented above: one which would combine into a whole that is suitable for the translation of LBH, taking into account the wider spectrum of cases to be dealt with in these cases.

Some of the strategies above are more specialised in scope, for instance Offord’s strategies for translating Shakespeare’s puns, while others are more general in nature, for example Delabastita’s theory on the translation of puns. None of them, however, encompasses all possible approaches and most of them are, through some adaptation, applicable to a wide range of wordplay translation problems. Different scholars sometimes use differing names for similar strategies and, to some extent, overlapping strategies may cross each other’s boundaries, be divided into more specific sub-categories within the same strategy, or their definition for a strategy may vary slightly depending on which text type or wordplay the strategy is supposed to be for.

In the table, the cells in each column under a heading stand for one strategy, i.e. in which way that particular translation problem could be translated. Thus under “Puns” (Delabastita) all the cells indicate ways to translate a pun. The first strategy for “Puns” is to translate it with a TL pun that is more or less similar to the SL pun, the next two strategies indicate that the pun be translated as a non-pun, either so that both senses of the ambiguity are rendered or that only one of them is represented. The third strategy is to use another type of rhetorical device, the fourth to omit the pun altogether, etc.

The grey areas indicate that a strategy suggested in the set of strategies by another scholar is not included in that particular set where the grey area appears, as is the case under Delabastita right below “Pun”. This indicates that for those strategies that are at the same horizontal level as the grey area in the table, there is no similar type of strategy offered by Delabastita. These strategies are “Free Translation” (Wisselinck), “Free Style” (Weissbrod), “Transcribed”, “Substitution” (Hermans), and “Adaptation” (Gottlieb).

A single strategy in one set may also be represented by multiple strategies in another set. This is due to the fact that some approaches on wordplay translation focus more on a single type of strategy, defining it more precisely. For
example, “Pun” (Delabastita) is divided under Veisbergs’ translation strategies for contextually transformed idioms into four different translation strategies, which gives a more detailed description for the approach.

Some of the strategies seem to be more general than others, while some are more detailed. Below is my proposal for a set of strategies, which I hope forms a balanced whole for LBH translation.

4.4. Potential Strategies for Translation of Language-Bound Humour

I have composed a set of strategies which divides into six primary strategies, some of which include more specific strategies. The six primary strategies are:

- retention of LBH
- literal translation
- usage of non-language-bound humour devices
- compensation
- omission
- editorial techniques.

The first primary strategy indicates that the language-bound humour item is to be translated as an LBH, of either the same, modified, or of a different type. The second primary strategy includes strategies that somehow “translate” the meaning of the LBH in different ways, possibly losing its humour. The third primary strategy includes strategies that replace a language-bound humour device with another type of rhetorical or stylistic method. Compensatory methods are discussed next. Omission indicates leaving out the LBH, and editorial techniques refer to a range of metalingual comments at the translator’s disposal.

This is a list for use in a problematic situation, a kind of tool for the translator who is thinking about a solution to the problem at hand. It is not a prescriptive set from which one strategy has to be chosen, but it could rather be thought of as a toolbox from which one may be chosen. Although my intention is to be helpful for the translators dealing with LBH translation and the list should cover all possible translation solutions, it is not my intention to suggest that it is the ultimate power tool with which all possible LBH problems can be solved. These strategies have been used in the translation of the examples provided, and
as such it is a descriptive model, in part derived from the example material collected from the four novels and in part from the works of previous scholars on wordplay translation.

Next, I shall discuss each of these primary strategies and present examples that illustrate how they are utilized in translating LBH.

4.4.1. Retention of Language-Bound Humour

These strategies aim at preserving the source text LBH in the target text in one form or another, so that both the humorous element and informational element remain. The different strategies are:

- translate with the same LBH type (e.g. pun by pun, idiom by idiom)
  - translate with similar wording
  - translate with different wording
- translate by adding elements that help retain ambiguity and humour
- translate with a different LBH type

Translating with the same LBH type and the same wording indicates that the source text LBH, of whichever type, is replaced by similar type of target text LBH with the same wording. This is obviously impossible for those LBH devices that do not exist in the target language, as for instance rhyming slang in English as compared with Finnish. For some LBH types, this might be a relatively easy option, however, as for instance in meaningful names when translated between closely related languages, or in contextually transformed idioms when both languages share the same or nearly the same idiom. Also, the translation of certain puns is aided by linguistic closeness, as is the case in the following example of the pun in the title of Oscar Wilde’s play and its Dutch translation:

The Importance of Being Earnest  
Het belang van Ernst (in Delabastita 1996: 135.)

Although this is not an exact one-to-one translation it is similar enough to illustrate the point, but perhaps this method is best suited to idiom transformations where the two languages share a near-identical idiom that is contextually transformed, as in the following contextually transformed idiom in which a device of insertion is used:
A competent minister in the hand is worth many generals in the bush (in Veisbergs 1997: 158)

Parempi pätevä ministeri pivossa kuin kymmenen kenraalia oksalla (trans. PM).

The translation of the same LBH type with different wording includes those translations that retain both the humour and ambiguity, but which are different formally. For example, in the following translation of the ST pun the translator has retained both humorous ambiguity and the surface meaning of the pun:

[T]he woman is nuttier than squirrel shit. (IC: 40)
[S]e nainen on kajahtaneempi kuin kirkonkello. (VH: 37)

The translated pun has a very different surface form, but it conveys admirably well the idea and the humour of the original.

The modification of the LBH involves adding elements to the original which help in retaining the humour and the ambiguity in it. This may be done for instance with the addition of “some explanatory information” (Veisbergs 1997: 165), as is done in the following attempt at catching the ambiguity of the original vertical homonymic pun, rendering it with a horizontal (vaguely) paronymic pun:

‘[T]hat was another very sexy waxing from the very sexy Brenda. It made me want to reach for the knob … to turn up the volume, I mean!’ (IC: 210)

”[S]iinä oli aina yhtä seksikkään Brendan seksikäs esitys. Teki ihan mieli tarttua nipukoihin … tuota, siis, näihin nippeleihin joista säädetään ääntä voimakkaammaksi!” (VH: 203)

Related to the modification of LBH is the modification of its “immediate or wider textual environment” (Delabastita 1996: 135). Here the addition of explanatory information is not enough; the surrounding text has to be modified in order for the pun to be successful.

Ewe’d have tae be good at your trade ta compete wi aw the sheep up thaire. Ewe’d have tae be good! Get it? (FI: 307)

Siellähän ei ole koiraa karvoihin katsominen, mitä asiakkaisiin tulee. Karvoihin katsominen! Tajuatko. (PA: 309)
The translator has changed the text entirely, so that it better conveys the punning sense of the original intended horizontal homonymic pun. The overriding function of the LBH has been the creation of punning effect, and the translator has disregarded the literal meaning of the adjacent words.

Translating by a different LBH type involves changing the type of the LBH from one to another.

I can see that it almost strikes a chord with this Kitchen Sink’s fucked up way of thinking. (FI: 48)

Huomaan, että sisar hento keltainen melkein myöntää olevansa samaa mieltä. (PA: 57)

Here the original rhyming slang (Kitchen Sink → Chink, “a Chinese” [COED]) is replaced by a transformation of the idiomatic expression sisar hento valkoinen by substituting the last word with keltainen, which in a derogatory way indicates the skin colour of the person in question.

4.4.2. Literal Translation

This strategy covers cases where the words of the original LBH are translated literally without necessarily including the humorous element. This includes:

- translating one of the meanings of the ambiguity
- translating both meanings of the ambiguity.

Ambiguity generally involves one surface meaning and one or more underlying meanings. Offord defines surface meaning as “primary” and underlying meaning as “secondary” meaning (1997: 241). This does not answer the question of which is the more important and which is the less important meaning. It depends on the text type and the function of the wordplay. In the example above, The woman is nuttier than squirrel shit (IC: 40), the apparent surface meaning is that the woman is crazy, but if we take into consideration the fact that this text type represents humorous text and that the function of the LBH is to produce a comic effect, then we could as well conclude that the primary meaning is the absurd notion of the woman consisting of nuts. Therefore, to simplify the debate, I consider there to be
a “meaning #1” and a “meaning #2”, each of which can be of primary concern, thus resulting in the strategy “translate one of the meanings”.

In translating one of the meanings of the ambiguity, the translator then decides which meaning is the one s/he should concentrate on, or “select one of the senses at the cost of suppressing the other” (Delabastita 1996: 134). This is obviously a translator-dependent choice, based on the text type, LBH function, translator’s competence, etc. One should, though, bear in mind that “[t]ranslating comedy in order to produce comedy entails that intended comic effect is a priority that is both very high on the scale of importance and a global one, i.e. relevant to the text as a whole” (Zabalbeascoa 1996: 247, original emphasis), or in other words, that the text type and LBH function are sometimes closely interlinked.

In the following, the translator has opted for the explication of the word *smoke* as “smoking tobacco” instead of “emit smoke or visible vapour” (COED).

“Did you *smoke* afterwards [i.e. after sexual intercourse] or just gently steam?” (IC: 210)

”*Poltelitteko savuketta* jälkeenpäin, vai höyrysittekö muuten vain?” (VH: 203)

This translation still captures some of the wordplay involved in the LBH, but it seems more incidental than planned. The literal translation may also hide the wordplay wholly as in the following example.

Perhaps it [i.e. an attacking squirrel] was after Sam’s *nuts*. (IC: 159)

Ehkä se havitteli Samin *kiveksiä*. (VH: 153)

Translating both meanings of the ambiguity might well lead to what Delabastita calls translating the wordplay “beyond recognition” (1996: 134). In the following, an attempt is made at communicating both the horizontal paronymic pun and the surface meaning by literal translation.

The women who come here are so close to hoorodm, it’s a mere point of detail. **Demi Moore. Semi Hoor.** I like that, Semi Hoor. (FI: 144)

Täällä käyvät naiset ovat lähes käytännössä huoria, kyse on vivamenteista. **Demi Moore. Semi Hoor. Puolihuora.** Aika hyvä, Semi Hoor. (PA: 150)
4.4.3. Usage of Non-Language-Bound Humour Devices

Using non-language-bound humour devices includes strategies which render the LBH by a rhetorical device such as repetition, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony, paradox, etc. (Delabastita 1996: 134; de Vries & Verheij 1997: 72), or “employing all stylistic levels … in the target language” and “appropriate … images … which the reader might recognize [as] idioms and images from her own context” (Daly 1978: 9).

So, even though the wordplay in the LBH is lost, it is replaced with a stylistic effect, which has a compensatory value for the text as a whole. The appropriateness of the device used depends on the target culture norms (Weissbrod 1996: 221).

In the following example, the translator has opted for rendering the surface meaning of the pun; my own, alternative translation is an example of a non-LBH device.

Lucy is over there looking saucier than the condiments shelf at Sainsbury’s. The very definition of the word shaggable. (IC: 15)

Tuossa Lucy istuu ja näyttää varsinaiselta namupalalta, suorastaan sanan ”naitava” määritelmältä. (VH: 13)

Lucy istuu tuolla ja näyttää sievältä kuin suloinen seireeni, suorastaan naitavan hyvältä. (Translation PM)

I have used alliteration to replace the LBH, and added a compensatory idiom, syötävän hyvää, transformed by substitution.

Below is an example of [p] consonant assonance used as a translation strategy, which also recaptures some of the wordplay of the original with its non-LBH rhetorical device.

Not that he was much of a stud today. Frankly, I’ve seen harder knobs on the door of a bouncy castle. (IC: 29)

Vaikka ei hänestä tänään oriksi ollut. Olen nähnyt kovempia pomppupatjojakin. (VH: 27)
4.4.4. Compensation

In compensation the translator inserts a special textual device, LBH or non-LBH, into a different part of the text (e.g. Veisbergs 1996: 168). The question of with which device the compensation is achieved is primarily irrelevant. As to where the compensatory element is inserted, Harvey distinguishes the following:

- **parallel compensation**
  - compensating device occurs in identical textual position as the lost ST LBH
- **contiguous compensation**
  - compensating device occurs within a short distance from the lost ST LBH
- **displaced compensation**
  - compensating device occurs a long distance from the lost ST LBH
- **generalized compensation**
  - compensating device is not tied to any specific lost ST LBH (Harvey 1995: 82–84).

Additionally, the manner in which the compensation is achieved is of importance. The translator may choose from two options: (i) non-LBH → LBH or (ii) zero → LBH (cf. Delabastita 1996: 134). The first one involves introducing an LBH in a part of the text where there is no wordplay, and the second indicates that “totally new textual material is added” (Delabastita 1996: 134).

Harvey’s parallel relationship compensation is equivalent with retention of LBH, and leaving this out and combining Harvey’s contiguous relationship, displaced compensation, and generalized compensation with Delabastita’s non-LBH → LBH and zero → LBH compensation manner, we have six ways to achieve compensation:

(i) translating a non-LBH as LBH within a short distance from the lost ST LBH
(ii) inserting wholly new textual material in the form of LBH within a short distance from the lost ST LBH
(iii) translating a non-LBH as LBH within a long distance from the lost ST LBH
(iv) inserting wholly new textual material in the form of LBH within a long distance from the lost ST LBH
(v) translating any non-LBH as LBH
(vi) inserting wholly new textual material in the form of LBH anywhere in the text.
The question of compensation is a complicated one, and “the study of compensation requires an interpretative act” (Crisafulli 1996: 275), making it into a not wholly objective activity. The most certain way to ascertain that a particular element is indeed compensation is that the translator self points this out, as I have done in the first example in the previous sub-section. Nevertheless, below is an obvious example of compensation.

“Well, there was Mystery,” the Mock Turtle replied, counting off the subjects on his flappers,— “Mystery, ancient and modern, Seaography; then Drawling—the Drawling-master was an old conger-eel, that used to come once a week: he taught us Drawling, Stretching, and Fainting in Coils.” (Carroll 1998 [1865]: 85)


There is no corresponding phrase for the added one in the original, but it is rather difficult to judge whether the compensation here is intended as generalized compensation or more local one, for instance for the three vertical paronymic puns at the end of the passage.

4.4.5. Omission

Omission can be described as simply omitting the piece of text containing the wordplay (Delabastita 1996: 134), or both as leaving the passage out or translating so that the wordplay is lost (Veisbergs 1996: 169). Since the loss of wordplay may result from literal translation or other translating strategies, I shall adopt Delabastita’s definition. As a translation method this is rather paradoxical one: translating an item by not translating it at all seems anomalous.

The question of omission boils down to the function of the LBH, target text norms, and the competence of the translator (Veisbergs 1997: 169). Thus, omission may be considered if the function of the LBH is considered minor, or if the translation would produce “an artificial and strained effect [on the TT].”
(ibid.), or if the translator feels s/he is restricted by other factors such as lack of time.

In the following example, the importance of the communicative function of the wordplay is debatable, as its omission does not seem to restrict the understanding of the other information in the passage.

Apparently, however, fishie brekkie is the last word in traditional crusty, old English chic (‘chic’ I believe being the traditional spelling of ‘shite’), so Claridge’s of course offers it. (IC: 139)

Ilmestä kala-aamiainen on viimeistä huutoa muodikkaasti perienglantilaisessa perinteisessä keittiötaitteessa, ja tietenkin Claridgeella on tarjolla sellaista. (VH: 134)

The fact that the omitted passage appears within parentheses does seem to repress it into secondary informational status, hence the omission. Furthermore, the question of interpretability of compensation is apparent in this translation as well. It could well be that the repetitive peri in perinteisessä perienglantilaisessa is meant as compensatory device for the omitted passage, and so there would, in effect, be omission plus compensation in the translated passage.

4.4.6. Editorial Techniques

Editorial techniques include footnotes, endnotes, translator’s comments in a foreword or an afterword, explanations in parentheses, etc. The suitability of editorial techniques as a translation strategy for LBH is largely based on the text type and function of the text and the LBH. In a humorous novel, the editorial techniques seem to be of limited use, while when translating “radical feminist wordplay” (cf. von Flotow 1997) the editorial techniques may be of a major importance. Toury introduces the terms “scientific” and “communicative” as “two diametrically opposed translation methods” (1997: 284) that reflect the degree of authenticity and intelligibility of the translation. On the one hand, in a text whose function is to amuse in a leisurely manner, the communicative translation method would demand an intelligibly translated TT without the intervention caused by editorial techniques. On the other hand, a “scientific” text, which relies heavily on
“authenticity” (in Toury’s 1997 terms), the editorial techniques are acceptable translation method, perhaps even preferred over others (see e.g. Daly 1978: 9).

4.5. From Theory to Practice: An Example

The discussion thus far has remained at a theoretical descriptive level. In the introduction, I promised that I would provide an example of an LBH translation process that would make use of the descriptive discussion. Thus, in this section, I shall discuss the practical application of the theory. I shall present one LBH problem, and go through its translation process and try to employ the different strategies for the translation. In addition to the original omission, I shall give an example for each strategy except compensation, as the nature of compensation would usually call for a larger text sample so that it could be effectively exemplified.

The language-bound humour in the example is of a peripheral type, namely humour derived from a different language variety, here an unsuitable register. The humour seems to derive from a sociolinguistic and semantic ambiguity: the person using the word “dissing” is not seen belonging to a social group that would have this word in their active register.

‘So what you’re telling me, Sam, is that this note dissing the BBC’ (he used the word ‘dissing’ even though he’s a thirty-six-year-old white freckly philosophy graduate from Durham university) ‘was actually intended as a job application to one of the foremost independent producers in the country?’ (IC: 86)

In the original translation, the translator opted for the omission of the passage in the parentheses:

"Väitä siis, että tämä viesti jossa sinä ruttaat BBC:n oli oikeastaan tarkoitettu työpaikkahakemukseksi yhdelle maan parhaista yksityisistä tuottajista." (VH: 82)

The question of recognition is clearly not an issue here since the translator has decided not to include the passage with the LBH problem in the translation. He has recognised the LBH and analysed it, and decided to leave it out. To produce the alternative translations, I shall start off by analysing the passage, and deduce
its functions and what effect they might have on my translation process. The aspects that should be taken into consideration when analysing the LBH were:

- **function of the LBH**
  - does the LBH have more functions than one?
  - what is the primary function?
- **special knowledge**
  - what knowledge does the translator need?
  - what knowledge does the TT reader need?
- **form**
  - can the LBH be said to belong to a definable category?
    - is there a similar LBH category in the TT?
  - can the LBH be reduced to its component parts and further analysed?

The first thing to consider, then, is the function of the LBH. I see its function as (i) providing a humorous aside (it is written inside parentheses, the genre of the book is humorous novel), (ii) telling something about the character who is speaking (he has a tendency to mix slang and standard language, even though he is an educated person), and (iii) telling something about the attitude of the narrator towards the character (feeling of some resentment towards him).

Because the passage appears in a humorous novel, the main function would seem to be providing a humorous aside. Also the fact that the character in question is a minor character in the story and thus perhaps his characterization is of secondary importance supports this assumption. The narrator, however, is one of the two major characters in the story, which is written in a diary form, and therefore his attitude towards the speaker is one aspect of his characterization. So, I would consider the main functions of this LBH to be providing humour and characterising the narrator.

The knowledge needed from the translator is the connotations that the word “dissing” has, namely that it is slang word meaning to “put a person down; bad-mouth” (COED) and that it originates from the American hip-hop subculture, and thus is an inappropriate word to be used by a “philosophy graduate from Durham university”. The TT reader should thus be made aware of the clash between the register and its user.

As to the form of the LBH, I have already pointed out that it is a peripheral LBH which derives its humour from different language varieties. Does the target
language have a similar LBH device then? I think the answer is yes, although due to cultural differences the exact connotations may be dissimilar. Further analysis of the component parts of the LBH does not seem to be applicable to this particular LBH.

I shall now proceed by presenting five different translations of the LBH, in addition to the original omission, by following various translation strategies. The strategy retention of LBH provides three alternatives for use:

- translate with the same LBH type with similar wording
- translate with the same LBH type with different wording
- translate by adding elements that help retain ambiguity and humour.

Translating with the same LBH type with similar wording coincides in this case with literal translation (I have emphasised the relevant items in all my examples):

"Väität siis, että tämä viesti jossa sinä dissaat BBC:tä" (se käytti sanaa dissa 36-vuotias filosofian maisteri) ’oli oikeastaan tarkoitettu työpaikkahakemukseksi yhdelle maan parhaista yksityisistä tuottajista.”

In Finnish, there is a slang word “dissaa” (see Paunonen 2000), which has the same meaning as the English word. It is, however, not used nearly as extensively as in English2, and can only be found in a special slang dictionary – a fact which might make this translation less accessible to some of the TT readers. By the addition of an editorial technique we are able to point out the meaning:

"Väität siis, että tämä viesti jossa sinä dissaat BBC:tä” (se käytti sanaa dissa 36-vuotias filosofian maisteri) ”oli oikeastaan tarkoitettu työpaikkahakemuksekseksi yhdelle maan parhaista yksityisistä tuottajista.”

This, however, looks very clumsy and abruptly stops the flow of the text. Of these two, I would prefer the first one as it clearly indicates that this word exists, and

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2 One way to compare the difference in the frequency of the usage of the English word “dissing” and the Finnish word “dissaa” is to use an Internet search-engine for both words. I used the AltaVista search-engine (http://www.altavista.com) and found 6 instances of “dissaa”, and 12,015 instances of “dissing”. Even though English-language sites significantly outnumber Finnish-language sites, the result would seem to support my argument that dising is known more widely in the English-speaking world than dissaa is in the Finnish-speaking world.
gives the pleasure of recognition for those familiar with the word and its origin, and perhaps motivates some readers to find out the mystery behind this LBH item.

One way to overcome the clumsiness that using editorial techniques causes is adding elements that help retain the humour, and in this way help the reader in understanding the LBH. In the following translation, I have added an element that gives a hint as to which register the term belongs:

"Väität siis, että tämä viesti jossa sinä dissaat BBC:tä" (se käytti sanaa dissa vaikka se on 36-vuotias filosofian maisteri eikä mikään teinihoppari) "oli oikeastaan tarkoitettu työpaikkahakemukseksi yhdelle maan parhaista yksityisistä tuottajista."

By translating with the same LBH type with different wording, where the word is from perhaps a more familiar (mock-)register is also a possibility. In the following, I have also modified the passage inside the parentheses so that it accentuates the second function of the LBH, namely the attitude of the narrator towards the character:

"Väität siis, että tämä viesti jossa sinä disrespektoit BBC:tä" (mikä idiootti) "oli oikeastaan tarkoitettu työpaikkahakemukseksi yhdelle maan parhaista yksityisistä tuottajista."

So far, I have only concentrated on the LBH item itself and its immediate surrounding text. By using a non-language-bound humour device we may retain the humour within the passage. This can be achieved for example by a stylistic modification of the whole passage in order to reproduce the desired functions and effects. The following example illustrates this:

"Siis tää viesti, jossa sä niinku herjaat BBC:tä" (se niinku puhu just niinku tälleen) "oli tota oikeestaan työpaikkahakemus yhelle maan parhaista tuottajista."

This stylistic modification is rather extreme, but I trust it does demonstrate the possibilities provided by this strategy.

In this translation process, I have made some use of the earlier theoretical discussion, which would indicate that it might have relevance for translation practice as well, although I cannot claim that it is useful in each and every case of LBH. Only further empirical study would ascertain the value this study has in "real life" situations.
5. Conclusion

As I embarked on this thesis, I put forward several aims for this study: a taxonomical categorisation of language-bound humour, and an attempt at providing a translation process and a set of strategies for the translation of language-bound humour. Hopefully, this has led to a reasonably helpful instrument for the recognition, analysis, and translation of language-bound humour.

I have provided a taxonomy for the concept of language-bound humour which I divided into three categories, two central and one peripheral. I have explained each category to the best of my ability, but remain aware that the taxonomical divide provided is inadequate to some extent, and in need of further clarity, especially in the case of peripheral language-bound humour. Adequate categorising and definition of the peripheral LBH would call for a lot more language-specific study in order to come up with a precise description for the whole category even in one single language. But still I do not deem peripheral LBH inferior to the other categories, only more demanding – a more creative humorist could perhaps come up with entirely new categories.

As for the translation process for language-bound humour, I assume my set of strategies are applicable and useful to some and in some contexts, as was exemplified by the translation example. As a fully clear-cut step-by-step translation procedure the suggested process is undeniably slightly vague. But at the same time it is general enough so that its applicability is not limited to a single language or language pair, nor to a single instance of LBH, but is useful for a wide array of different LBH items.

I hope to have illuminated some aspects of translating LBH in such a way as to provide a few new insights and views on the translation of LBH and wordplay. What I have definitely accomplished, however, is broadening of my own horizons concerning the subject of wordplay translation. Not to mention translation in general.
Works Cited


Carroll, Lewis. 1995 [1865]. Alicen seikkailut Ihmemaassa. Translated from the original Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Alice Martin. Porvoo: WSOY.


