

## The Translation of Wordplay in *The Amazing World of Gumball* Cartoon Series

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### Abstract

Revealing humorous effects played in translated wordplay is the objective of this study. Translating wordplay has always been a challenge for many translators. *The Amazing World of Gumball* is a comedy cartoon series which depends on wordplay as its major recurrent punchlines. The purposes of the study are to identify the types of wordplay and to analyze the translation strategies employed by the translator in translating the wordplay found in *The Amazing World of Gumball* into the Indonesian language based on Schröter's classification of wordplay and translation strategies of wordplay proposed by Delabastita as the main theoretical frameworks. This study applies a descriptive-qualitative method with observation as the main technique. The data used in this research are the utterances that contain wordplay in the form of words, phrases, clauses and sentences taken from English-dubbed videos of *The Amazing World of Gumball* and the Indonesian dubbing version. The findings of the study reveal that there are three types found in the series, which consist Homonymy, Paronymy, and Polysemy. The result also shows out of the six strategies proposed, four wordplay translation strategies are used by the translator. They are Wordplay to Wordplay, Wordplay to Non-wordplay, Wordplay to Zero, and ST Wordplay=TT Wordplay.

**Keywords:** cartoon, translation strategies, types of wordplay, wordplay

### INTRODUCTION

*The Amazing World of Gumball* (TAWOG) is a comedy cartoon series that offers wordplay as its major reoccurring punchlines and has been dubbed into many other languages, including Indonesian language. People, especially the younger audiences often find wordplay in TAWOG are difficult to understand. This case also applies to translators since wordplay is closely related and designed mainly only to work in the source language (SL). As a result, they are difficult to be transferred into the target language (TL).

Many translators may have claimed that wordplay is a type of humour that is often challenging or even impossible to translate. However, Newmark (1988) affirms that any kind of language style can be translated, and it becomes “untranslatable” simply because “an adequate degree of equivalence is hard to achieve” (Chiaro, 2010). In this case, translation is needed and translators must provide an appropriate translation in order for the audience to easily understand the humour conveyed.

Translating wordplay is not an easy task. Some requirements and methods must be considered to produce a good translation, for instance, the type of text, the

cultural context and the context of the word itself. Consequently, any attempt to translate a wordplay should take into consideration a range of linguistic factors. Not to mention, there are a lot of wordplay in English that are often difficult to be translated into Indonesian because of the differences in cultures, structures, spelling, pronunciation, as well as other linguistic features between the two languages.

According to Attardo (1994), wordplay is considered a metalinguistic phenomenon in which the speakers are consciously taking advantage of certain characteristics of a language to create humorous effects. Further, Delabastita (1996) generally defines the term wordplay as the various textual phenomena in which structural features of particular languages are exploited to produce a communicatively significant confrontation of two or more linguistic structures with closely similar forms but different meanings. In other words, wordplay deals with the clash between two different meanings of words that create a humorous essence (Delabastita, 2004). Furthermore, Leppihalme (1997) stated that wordplay can be used on several different features of the languages involved. These features include pronunciation, spelling, morphology, vocabulary or syntax. For this purpose,

Schröter (2005) classifies the types of wordplay into the following:

1) Homonymy

Homonymy is words with the same spelling and the same pronunciation, yet have a different meaning. It is used in the wordplay by exploiting the lexical ambiguity of the word.

2) Homophony

Homophony is words that are similar in pronunciation but are different in spellings. The words also have a different meaning.

3) Homography

Homography is words which are different in pronunciation but the same in spellings.

4) Paronymy

Paronymy occurs when there is a little difference in the spelling and pronunciation of some words, yet the meaning of the words are not related.

5) Polysemy

Polysemy is a word that has several meanings. Schröter (2005) stated the meanings from polysemous words are different, but the words are still related since they are generated from the same root.

The ambiguous meanings of words and the system in a language that has its own characters are also factored into the difficulties in translating wordplay Davis, 1997, as cited in Delabastita, 1997). Accordingly, translation strategies need to be employed to come up with better performance for translators. Some strategies can be used in translating wordplay, and these translation strategies can be applied for different types of wordplay. For this purpose, Delabastita (2004) originally proposes eight translation strategies that can be used in translating wordplay, however, two strategies have been omitted: Non-wordplay to Wordplay and Zero to Wordplay, as this study focuses on wordplay translation:

1) Wordplay to Wordplay

This strategy renders the wordplay in the source text (ST) into a wordplay in the target text (TT).

2) Wordplay to Non-wordplay

The strategy is applied when ST wordplay is translated literally into the TT. Moreover, the meaning of wordplay can be either lost or preserved in the process of translation.

3) Wordplay to Related rhetorical device

This strategy is applied in order to maintain the effect of the wordplay by using rhetorical devices such as repetition, alliteration, rhyme, irony, and paradox.

4) Wordplay to Zero

This strategy depicts the ST wordplay is completely omitted and neither in any way translated nor left untranslated. This strategy is applied when there is no

equivalence in the TT or the translator considers that the wordplay is not important.

5) ST Wordplay=TT Wordplay

This strategy is applied when the wordplay of the ST is left untranslated and the translator adopted the ST wordplay as another wordplay in the TT.

6) Editorial Technique

This strategy is applied by giving explanations of some words or phrases that contain wordplay in the form of footnotes, endnotes or comments so that readers can further understand the meaning of a particular wordplay.

Furthermore, by applying proper translation strategies, the humor essence of the wordplay can be successfully conveyed and this will result in good quality of translation.

The research on wordplay is not new in the field of translation studies. Many studies have been conducted concerning of wordplay translation. One of the studies conducted by Lundquist (2014) examines the translation strategies used by the translator to render wordplay and the cultural references from English into Swedish that are found in *The Very Best of British: A humorous collection of all things quirky about Britain and the Brits* based on translation strategies presented by Delabastita (1996) and the analysis of cultural references on strategies presented by Pedersen (2007). The study concludes that Wordplay to Wordplay strategy is the most used in the translation and the cultural references are mainly rendered by using source-oriented strategies; Retention and strategies that have been combined with Retention are frequently used.

Another study by Maharani (2016) describes the type of wordplay and the techniques applied in translating the wordplay in the subtitle of the *The Big Bang Theory* movie according to Delabastita (1993) concerning with types of wordplay and translation techniques by Humanika (2012). The study found that there are three types of wordplay which are phonological structure (homonymy and homophony), lexical development (idiom) and syntactic structure. Also, the techniques used by the translator consist of literal translation, loan translation, situational translation and no translation.

The last one is a study by Setyaningsih & Kurniawan (2021) which investigate the translation techniques used in the Indonesian translation of *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood based on Delabastita's (1996) translation techniques of wordplay. The result shows that the most frequently applied technique in the translation is Wordplay to Non-Wordplay. In addition, the result illustrates that the translation tends not to preserve the author's style of writing but one of the author's intended meanings.

In accordance with the research background above, this present study attempts to continue the undergoing

research on wordplay translation strategies. However, unlike the previous studies, this study employs Schröter's (2005) classification of wordplay and Delabastita's (2004) translation strategies as the main theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the data is taken from the wordplay that are found in a comedy cartoon series. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to identify the types of wordplay and then analyze the translation strategies employed by the translator in translating the English wordplay into the Indonesian language that are found in *TAWOG*.

## METHODS

This study applied a descriptive-qualitative method to answer all the research questions. The data used in this research were the utterances that contain wordplay in the form of words, phrases, clauses and sentences from the transcription of the original English video of *TAWOG* as the ST and its Indonesian dubbing version as the TT. The source of the data was the first 58 episodes of *TAWOG* that aired on the Indonesian national television channel NET TV in 2018. The videos were downloaded or streamed from media platforms Youtube, Cartoon Network channel, Vidio.com and the Instagram account of *tawoglovers\_id*.

The data were collected with an observation approach with the researcher as the key instrument for providing, explaining and interpreting the data. There were three data collection technique procedures conducted in order to attain the data. Firstly, the English and Indonesian *TAWOG* videos were observed to identify all the utterances that contain wordplay. Next, the wordplay found in ST and TT were transcribed. Lastly, the collected wordplay were transferred into a table to be listed and coded.

After the data were collected, data analysis techniques were employed in order to answer the research questions. The data were classified according to the types of wordplay and the strategies used in translating the wordplay. The ST data were classified into the types of wordplay according to Schröter (2005). Meanwhile, the TT data were determined according Delabastita's (1996) strategies in translating wordplay. The data were then analyzed and elaborated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Types of Wordplay

The result shows there are 30 wordplay found in *TAWOG*. According to Schröter (2005), there are five types of wordplay. However, only three types of wordplay are identified. They are paronymy, homonymy, and polysemy in respectively.

### Paronymy

This type of wordplay is created by contrasting the spelling and pronunciation of some words, yet the meaning of the words are unrelated. There are 17 paronymy in *TAWOG* as in conversation (1).

(1)

Darwin: He's getting away.

Gumball: I've got this. Hey! **Ketch this up!**

Gumball: Uh... **To be frank, you got no further** to go!

Gumball: Eh... **You mustard-mit**... there's no escape.  
(Datum 25)

Conversation (1) depicts Gumball was chasing the intruder that secretly resided inside his house, he threw several things toward them which were a ketchup bottle, a frankfurter sausage and a bottle of mustard. The wordplay plays with the words, particularly the name of objects respectively in the way they are slightly different in spelling and pronunciation; 'ketch this up' is the play on 'catch this up' and 'further' is derived from 'further' that only differ in one letter in their spellings yet slight difference in sound the pronunciation; /æ/ and /e/ in /kæf/ and /'kef/ and /ð/ and /d / in /fərðər/ and /fərdər/. Meanwhile, there is a similar pronunciation between the sentence 'you must admit' and 'you mustard-mit' with only differ in the sound /əd/ and /ərd/ respectively. Moreover, the meanings of the words above are unrelated.

### Homonymy

Second type is homonymy. The play of a word that means different. This type is created by exploiting the lexical ambiguity of the word. There are 7 homonymy wordplays found in *TAWOG*. As in the number (2).

(2)

Gumball: Did you just put the clothes in the dishwasher?

Richard: Yeah.

Darwin: Then what did you do with the dishes?

Gumball: Let's just say we like to dress **sharp**, but not that **sharp**. (Datum 6)

In this case, the wordplay in the datum 6 relies heavily on the playing on double meaning of a word with similar pronunciation. The first 'sharp' which is pronounced /ʃɑ:rp/ lexically refers to the broken dishes inside the washing machine. Meanwhile, the second 'sharp' also pronounced as /ʃɑ:rp/ is interpreted as the expression of addressing the way somebody dresses in a fashionable manner as the context is dealing with the way Gumball dresses. It happened when Principal Brown asked why Gumball came to school without any clothes, he then

proceeded with the explanation that his father Richard ruined all his clothes because he washed the clothes in the dishwasher and put the dishes inside the washing machine instead. Gumball told Principal Brown to consider that he likes to dress 'sharp', but not that 'sharp'.

### **Polysemy**

Unlike homonymy, polysemy is a word that has several similar meaning since they are generated from same root. This play-on-word also causes ambiguity. There are 6 polysemy found in the cartoon series. One of them is in the conversation (3).

(3)

Richard: Hey, kids! What's up?

Gumball: We couldn't get a refund, and now we're really **cheesed off**.

Richard: Watch your language, young man! **Cheese** is not to be invoked in vain in this house! (Datum 28)

In the conversation above, Gumball uses the phrase 'cheesed-off' to figuratively express his anger or annoyance. This phrase derived from the idiom 'chase off' which means to drive someone away. However, Richard misunderstood and interpreted the word in its literal meaning. Moreover, the use of polysemy as a basis of wordplay is rather accidental and depends on one's interpretation (Kuchařová, 2013). In this case, Richard's misinterpretation was resulted from the immediate situational context as he is fond of cheese and he did not want them to talk about cheese in a negative connotation.

Based on the findings above, it can be said that the most dominant type of wordplay found in *TAWOG* is paronymy with 17 data out of 30 data found. This may result as creating paronymic wordplay is much easier than other types of wordplay (Eerio, 2014) as paronymy is a mixed use of words that almost have the same pronunciation or spelling. Moreover, paronymy does not require identical characteristics on the both aspect (Dvorakova, 2012), hence, any words can be transformed into wordplay.

On the contrary, the occurrence of homonymy and polysemy are limited. Polysemy is the least wordplay that appears in *TAWOG* with only 6 data found. Unlike homonymy, polysemy is one and the same word that has several meanings. However, both homonymy and polysemy rely heavily on the lexical ambiguity of the words. In addition, there are no homophony and homography that are found in *TAWOG*.

### **Wordplay Translation Strategies**

Out of six strategies proposed by Delabastita (2004), there are four translation strategies that are applied by the translator in translating wordplay in *TAWOG*:

#### **Wordplay to Wordplay**

Even though it is considered to be difficult for translators to apply this strategy, there are 3 data found in the translation of *TAWOG* which rendered as Wordplay to Wordplay translation strategy. One of the examples as illustrated below:

ST

Anais: Dad, for the last time, there won't be any **apocalypse**. It's just an **eclipse**.

Richard: **Apocalytips, apoc-eclipse**. It's all the same, smarty pants.

TT

Anais: Ayah, terakhir kalinya, dunia tak akan **kiamat**. Itu hanya **gerhana**.

Richard: **Gernaha, gerhaha**. Semuanya sama saja, anak sok tahu. (Datum 8)

The words in the datum 8 are considered as paronymic wordplay as they are derived from both words apocalypse and eclipse. The translation of the data shows 'apocalypse' and 'eclipse' are literally translated into 'kiamat' and 'gerhana' respectively. However, the translator rendered the wordplay 'apocalytips' and 'apoc-eclipse' into 'gernaha' and 'gerhaha.' The translated words are also considered as paronymy as there are play on words which derived from the word 'gerhana.' Based on the data, the translator has successfully employed Wordplay to Wordplay strategy.

#### **Wordplay to Non-wordplay**

In this study, Wordplay to Non-wordplay is the strategy that most used by the translator as out of the collected data, there are 23 data found in the translation of *TAWOG*. Below is the example of wordplay translated into non-wordplay:

ST

Nicole: Just below the star, where I am for **beating** everyone at the Company Paintball Day.

Anais: Wasn't that supposed to be a team-bonding exercise?

Nicole: Oh, I'm sure they all **bonded** in the hospital. Who's next?

TT

Nicole: Di bawah bintang, tempat ibu berada karena ibu **menang** di Hari Bola Cat Perusahaan.

Anais: Bukankah itu latihan keakraban tim?

Nicole: Ibu yakin mereka semua **akrab** di rumah sakit. Siapa selanjutnya? (Datum 3)

The wordplay in the datum 3 are the words 'beating' and 'bonded.' The wordplay are identified as homonymy since each words have multiple meanings depending on the context. Based on the ST, the meaning of the word 'beating' can be interpreted negatively as in 'fighting' or positively as in 'winning.' This also applies to the word 'bonded.' It can mean either 'being bandaged' or 'establishing an intimate relationship.' However, it is clear that the situation implicates the wordplay are indicate the ones in violent manner. In this case, the homonym may work well as wordplay in the ST, but it clearly does not work as wordplay in the TT as the translator applied the strategy of Wordplay to non-wordplay and translated the words 'beating' literally into 'menang' and 'bonded' into 'akrab,' thus making the wordplay is not taken into consideration.

#### Wordplay to Zero

There are only two data that used Wordplay to Zero strategy found in the translation of *TAWOG*. One of the examples is in datum 12:

ST

Leslie: Calm down, honey, you're being over **grammatic** this guy is too **shellfish** and he's being a total **control Greek**.

TT

Leslie: Tenang sayang, kau terlalu **tata bahasa. Aku bisa mengendalikannya, semua akan baik-baik saja.** (Datum 12)

The data above shows how Leslie's utterances are made up from several plays on words. Accordingly, those words are classified as paronymic wordplay because the words 'grammatic,' 'shellfish' and 'Greek' are derived from the words 'dramatic,' 'selfish' and 'geek' respectively. However, the translator only covers one of the wordplay 'grammatic' and it is translated literally into 'tata bahasa' which results in the loss of humour nor maintain any equivalence of the sound-play. Moreover, the translator applied the strategy Wordplay to Zero to omit the remaining wordplay in the ST that are 'shellfish' and 'Greek' since there are seemingly non-existing equivalents of the wordplay in the TT.

#### ST Wordplay=TT Wordplay

There are two data translated using ST Wordplay=TT Wordplay strategy. One of the examples as follows:

ST

Gumball: Okay, so...guess what's in the box?

Banana Bob, Banana Barbara, and Banana Joe: Pizza, pizza, pizza!

Gumball: Correct! And for ten points, what's round, from Italy, and sometimes has olives on it?

Banana Bob, Banana Barbara, and Banana Joe: Pizza, pizza, pizza!

Gumball: Right again! And, for double or nothing: what is the name of the tower that leans to one side?

Banana Bob, Banana Barbara, and Banana Joe: **Pizza, pizza, pizza!**

TT

Gumball: Tebak apa isi kotak ini?

Banana Bob, Banana Barbara, dan Banana Joe: Pizza, pizza, pizza!

Gumball: Tepat sekali! Dan sekarang pertanyaan bernilai sepuluh poin, benda apa yang bulat, dari Italia, dan kadang ada buah zaitun di atasnya?

Banana Bob, Banana Barbara, dan Banana Joe: Pizza, pizza, pizza!

Gumball: Benar lagi! Dan sekarang pertanyaan bonus: apa nama menara yang miring?

Banana Bob, Banana Barbara, dan Banana Joe: **Pizza, pizza, pizza!** (Datum 10)

The context of the data is when Gumball asked several questions to the Banana family, they answer him with only the words 'pizza.' The wordplay found in the dialogue above is paronymy because for the last question Gumball asked is the name of the tower that leans to one side which refers to Pisa Tower. The word 'pizza' which is a play on 'Pisa' works well as wordplay in both ST and TT as it is the name of a particular food which does not necessarily has to be translated. According to Delabastita (2004), the strategy of ST Wordplay=TT Wordplay allows the translator to reproduce the "original formulation" and the context of the wordplay that the translator does not need to translate or make any changes to it. Thus, the translator directly copies the wordplay 'pizza' from ST to TT and maintains its form by employing the strategy ST Wordplay=TT Wordplay.

It can be seen from the results above, Wordplay to Non-wordplay is the most used translation strategy. The collected data show that out of 30, there are 23 data found. Hence, the translator mainly used the strategy of Wordplay to Non-wordplay to translate the wordplay in *TAWOG*. This strategy is used by translators when there is no

equivalent of the ST wordplay and cannot be translated into another wordplay in the TT. In other words, the translator is likely more focused on the literal meaning of the wordplay. Moreover, Wordplay to Non-wordplay strategy might be considered as the easiest strategy to be used by the translator because the translator does not recreate the ST wordplay into the TT.

The strategy of Wordplay to Wordplay allows translators to recreate ST wordplay to another wordplay in the TT. Even though it is possible for the translator to apply Wordplay to Wordplay strategy, there are only 3 data found in *TAWOG*. This strategy can be applied for closely related languages. However, for languages that are not closely related such as English and Indonesian, it is difficult to translate the wordplay since both languages have significant differences in cultures and linguistics aspects. Moreover, Wordplay to Zero and ST Wordplay = TT Wordplay are equally the least strategies which occur in *TAWOG* with only 2 data found for each strategy.

Meanwhile, the translator does not use the rest of the strategies which are Wordplay to Related rhetorical device and Editorial Technique. Both of the strategies might not be considered as suitable for the translator in translating *TAWOG*. For instance, Editorial Technique requires notes in the form of words from translators that consist of an explanation concerning the wordplay (Delabastita, 2004). This strategy might work on written works, however, it is impossible to be employed in dubbing since the wordplay requires to be delivered verbally to create the humour.

## CONCLUSION

Wordplay is a linguistic construct that makes clever use of the meanings of words, especially in a humorous manner. The results show there are 30 wordplay found in the 58 episodes of *The Amazing World of Gumball*. Based on the data, out of five types of wordplay classifications, there are 3 types of wordplay identified. They are Homonymy, Paronymy and Polysemy. Additionally, Paronymy is the most recurrent wordplay in the series with 17 data identified in *TAWOG*. Meanwhile, Polysemy appears the least with only 6 data found in the series. The findings also show that among six wordplay translation strategies proposed, only four strategies are used by the translator which are Wordplay to Wordplay, Wordplay to Non-wordplay, Wordplay to Zero and ST Wordplay = TT Wordplay. The most frequent strategy used is Wordplay to Non-Wordplay with a total of 23 data, whereas Wordplay to Zero and ST Wordplay = TT Wordplay are equally the least strategies used by the translator with only 2 data found. The result indicates that the translator uses Wordplay to Non-Wordplay as the main strategy in translating *TAWOG* into Indonesian language. Therefore,

it can be concluded that even though it is not impossible, English wordplay is still considered difficult to translate into other languages, particularly Indonesian language

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