Irony in Sherlock (BBC, 2010): From Literary to Audiovisual Translation

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original ways to find the truth. In this sense, and despite the differences between their investigating methods, all three *enquêtrices* share one common trait regarding the observance of law: none of them respects any law if it stands in the way of solving the mystery. For instance, Parker-Simmons does not hesitate to hack hospital computer records in *La Parabole du tueur*. In the same way, Morvan usually hides pieces of information, lies to policemen, or threatens uncooperative witnesses. Regarding Khan, her transgression of law – the murder she commits – serves to highlight the failure of the justice system as an institution, an idea which is also present in the other cases: Parker-Simmons needs to hack the computer because legal authorization would have taken too long and Morvan investigates crimes that have been neglected by the police.

Thus, Morvan, Khan and Parker-Simmons not only represent an innovation as far as the traditional system of character is concerned, but they also underline the relativization of concepts such as "Justice" and "Law," a direct consequence of the postmodern era and the breakdown of traditional legitimizing discourses.

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Irony in *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010) From Literary to Audiovisual Translation

1   Introduction

In this study we seek to demonstrate that the protagonist of the bestseller, the detective Sherlock Holmes, has similar characteristics in both the literary and the audiovisual version.

This paper involves, therefore, an analysis of intersemiotic translation from literary text to audiovisual, taking as an example the above-mentioned literary figure. His importance in international fiction, from the Victorian age to the current day, is well known, and he has lent his name to numerous novels as well as cinematic and television films, as seen below. However, given that there are so many aspects which could be studied, we have limited ourselves to an analysis of the irony typical of him. Not only can the loquacity and deductive ability of Conan Doyle's detective be appreciated in this characteristic, it also takes in the essence of English humour, which is clearly present in his adventures.

For that purpose we begin with two theoretical aspects which form the basis for our study: firstly, the translation studies perspective as this concerns an intersemiotic translation, and, secondly, irony as a narrative resource. In the latter analysis we set out what irony is and how it is reflected in the literary character ("origin character"), and its correlation with the irony detected in the character of the TV series ("meta character").

We consider that the audiovisual "version" of a literary text is a type of intersemiotic translation in which the formal characteristics of the literary narration are extrapolated to the audiovisual communicative system. Numerous researchers have investigated this field,[1] and from amongst Zavala's more important contributions of relevance here is the comparison he makes between film narration and literary narration as regards the formal components,[2] and while some formal components are unique to each system, oth-

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[1]   Jakobson (1979) standing out as a pioneer from the linguistic point of view. Together with him, other notable scholars include Mijaíl Bajtín (1979), Hjelmslev (1967) and, most recently, Metzt (2002) and Torop (2002). In addition to those references, due to its relevance our study draws from the research of Zavala (2005, 2006, 2009) into translation from literature to cinema.

[2]   Lauro Zavala: *Elementos del discurso cinematográfico*. México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, Serie Libros de texto, 2005. See page 50.

ers are common to both, namely, the beginning, the end, the intertext and the ideology.

For that purpose, we first examine the distinguishing features of irony and how they are reflected in the literary character ("origin character"). Thereafter, through case studies extracted from the first novel of the collection, we will investigate its correlation with the character of the first episode of the television series ("meta character").
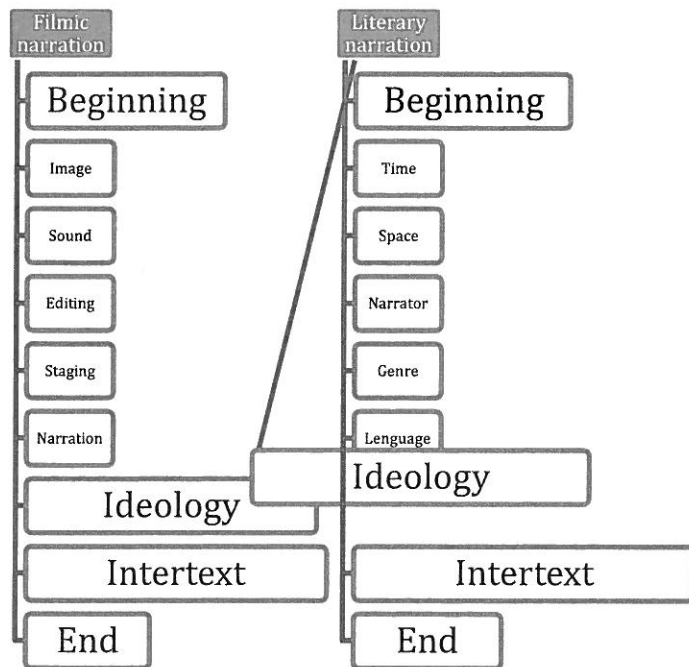

Fig. 1. Narrative and filmic narration components

There is room for the analysis of the irony in the so-called intertext given that the ethical, aesthetic and social aspects of the narration for the receiver are attributed to the intertext. It is from there that we begin our paper.[3]

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[3] See Lauro Zavala: "Elementos para el análisis de la intertextualidad." *Cuadernos de literatura* (1999). V (10), julio-diciembre, pp. 26–52.

2   Irony as a form of humour

Firstly, a definition and classification of the object of our study must be provided. To understand irony as a rhetorical figure helps us understand the mechanisms of its generation, and, thus, its translation.

Traditionally,[4] there are two definitions of irony: to say something different to what is meant, or to say the opposite of what is actually said. In other words, the factor which determines irony is the attitude of the speaker so that the receiver has to interpret suitably that attitudinal factor in order to access the appropriate meaning of the words.

From a pragmatic point of view,[5] irony entails a rupture with the principle of co-operation,[6] through flouting of any of the conversational maxims, frequently quality, which brings about unexpected situations whose outcome is the opposite of our initial expectations.

Meanwhile, in the field of literature, it is often related to exaggeration. In *classical irony*, the author makes his or her characters use exaggerated and incorrect language, leading even to the undervaluation of themselves and their own knowledge, while on the opposite side, they are excessively overvalued by the charactes, thus bringing about *romantic irony*.[7]

However, although for the above reasons this figure appears to have the objective of "deceiving," that is not the only objective, depending on the intention of the ironist. Without moving from literary narration, according to the study by Hutchens,[8] four types of irony can be distinguished:

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[4]   María Ángeles Torres: *Aproximación a la ironía verbal*. Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 1999. See pages 6–7.

[5]   Herbert Paul Grice: "Further notes on logic and conversation." In: P. Col (ed.): *Syntax and Semantics IX. Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press, 1978, pp. 113–127.

[6]   Grice's maxims are the backbone of his pragmatic theory. They are not scientific generalisations in the usual sense, but are more like contractual obligations or laws of the land.

–   The co-operative principle (a super-maxim) Make your contribution as required, when it is required, through the conversation in which you are engaged.

–   Quality: contribute only what you know to be true. Do not give information which is false or for which evidence is lacking.

–   Quantity: make your contribution as informative as is required but do not give unnecessary information.

–   Relation (Relevance) Make your contribution relevant.

–   Manner (i) Avoid obscurity; (ii) avoid ambiguity; (iii) be brief; and (iv) be orderly

[7]   José Schraibman & Leda Carazzola: "Hacia una interpretación de la ironía en La Regenta de Clarín." In: R. Johnson and P. Smith (eds.): *Studies in Honor of José Rubia Barcia*. Lincoln, NE: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1982. See page 176.

[8]   Eleanor Hutchens: "The identification of irony." In: *ELH* 27 (4) (1960), 352–363.

1. denotative irony, which consists of the use of a word with a meaning opposite to what is opposite to the real message/opposite to the meaning which it is hoped the audience will attribute to it.
2. connotative irony, in which the ironic term keeps its literal meaning, but brings about connotations which contrast with the truth which, in turn, renders judgement relative and makes one think that something may be good or true in some circumstances, but false and bad in others.
3. tonal irony, which, independently of the words employed in it, is based on the form in which the sequence has been constructed, in the ordering of the clauses and sentences, and in the puntuation
4. reference irony, when it refers to something so radically dissimilar that it causes a collision with the explicit reality.

Often, when using this resource, several of the types mentioned are simultaneously combined by the author. Likewise, alternation of verbal and non-verbal irony occurs, as distinguished by Zabalbeascoa,[9] that is, plays on words, ambiguous phrases, parodies and satires along with semiotic messages which are, among other things, iconic, gestural or sonic.

While the various stated intentions of irony make reference to the form thereof, its content is no less important. The deceit or the lie, we repeat, is not the only function of the rhetorical resource. It has another side which, apart from being able to coexist with the aspect already mentioned, may be more powerful and, thus, may prevail in the intended speech: humour.

The levels of humour that irony can offer have various intensities which go from the comical (involuntary situations) to the humorous (when the speaker intentionally suggests that contrast) and now, in the examples of accentuated or even cruel irony, we would find the burlesque, in the case of which we move closer to the terrain of sarcasm.

For the purposes of our study we are interested in the humorous and burlesque dimensions, given that they are what characterises the literary character chosen as Sherlock Holmes has a marked critical personality which, together with his deep British humour characterised by refined rules of courtesy, develops an ironic effect that at times is offensive and pointed.

In any event, in order for irony to be a source of humour, as Muecke[10] suggests, three requirements must be met:

- Feigned innocence on the part of the person who ironizes.
- Contrast between appearance and reality: the greater the contrast, the more effective the irony.
- Distancing attitude of the person who ironizes from a level of superiority in relation to the world.

9   Patrick Zabalbeascoa: *Translation Audiovisual Screen Irony*. Barcelona: Universidad Pompeu Fabra, 2003. See pages 206-207

10   Douglas Colin Muecke: *Irony* (Critical Idiom Series 13). London: Methuen, 1970.

When the requirements are met, they bring about two immediate effects; the amusement of the receivers and their aesthetic pleasure.

Both the requirements as well as the said effects are manifested through two channels, the verbal and the non-verbal. While both are developed in literary narration, they are much more evident in the audiovisual due to the auditory as well as the visual channel being more explicit.

3   Audiovisual irony

Irony in audiovisual narration, as in its filmic counterpart, presents the same characteristics and interpretations as those referred to above in literary narration. What happens in this field is that, in order for the narration to be created, two channels (visual and sound) are necessary, and, thus, use is made of the communicative aspects of both to induce the deceit, the humour, the mockery and so on. There is a classification of four types of audiovisual variable in which irony can be expressed are[11]:

a)   visual presentation – verbal signs: the irony contains a visual element which presents a verbal element (written). For example, in the episode of the series studied herein, they are the telephone messages written over the shots:

Fig. 2. Visual presentation – verbal signs

11   Dirk Delabastita: "Translation and mass-communication: film and TV translation as evidence of cultural dynamics." In: *Babel* 35 (4) (1989), pp. 193–218. See page 199.

b)   visual presentation – non-verbal signs: the irony is based on visual elements (non-verbal), such as the components of the image of the shot, that is to say, the decoration, the characters' clothes, the camera movements and such like. In the series, the perception of the ultramodern London of the 21st century as a replacement for the novel's 19th-century London is ironic:
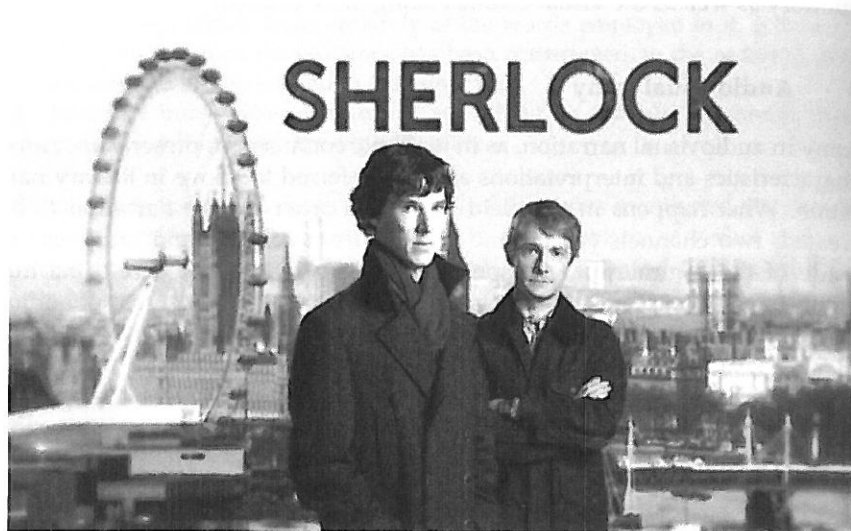

Fig. 3. Visual presentation – non-verbal signs

c)   acoustic presentation – verbal signs: the irony is based on the use of the expressions themselves, for example, conversations in which Sherlock's superiority stands out through comments loaded with irony. Such is the case in the dialogue between police officer Anderson and Sherlock:

Anderson: So we can read her e-mail. So what?

Sherlock: Anderson, don't talk out loud. You lower the IQ of the whole street.

d)   acoustic presentation – non-verbal signs: the irony is based on non-verbal elements nonetheless perceptible through the auditory channel such as noises, diegetic sounds, extradiegetic music and similar. An example is the elevated tone of voice used by Sherlock as opposed to the lower tone of the rest of the characters.

In any case, if the cinematographic character is based on a literary figure and a novel not characterised by their irony, their correct evolution to the audio-

visual narration will lack the same trait. Below we set out some of the aspects of literary Sherlock and how he corresponds to television Sherlock.

4   Introduction to Sherlock: from literary character (Conan Doyle, 1887) to audiovisual character (BBC, 2010)

The close relationship between the literary and the cinematographic characters has been praised by the critics since the series was first broadcast in 2010. Tom Sutcliffe,[12] critic for *The Independent*, wrote: "*Sherlock* is a triumph, witty and knowing, without ever undercutting the flair and dazzle of the original. It understands that Holmes isn't really about plot but about charisma... Flagrantly unfaithful to the original in some respects, *Sherlock* is wonderfully loyal to it in every way that matters."

From the very first scenes, attention is drawn to the modernity of British society. Far removed from the Victorian age, devices such as mobile phones, GPS, taxis and nicotine patches (in place of the pipe smoked by Doyle's character), among others, are used. However, this is nothing new given that using the latest technology is a trait of the literary character. As the series' director, Paul McGuigan, remarks: "I think it was important for us when we were doing this modern day version that we are understand what those elements are that people are attracted to and not lose anything in the modern day setting."[13]

Similarly, in the series there is nothing new about the place where the protagonists live. As in the novel, they live at 221B Baker Street. In reality they are the same characters, with the same personalities, in the same environment, but more than a century later. The change of era produces a contrasting effect which contributes very efficiently to the creation of the narration resource of irony.

Other examples of adaptation to the current day are Sherlock's accessories: while the Victorian went dressed in a tweed cape and deerstalker hat, he wears smart-casual in the new version. Both styles are out of the ordinary in their environments.

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12   Available at:
http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/the-weekends-tv-sherlock-sun-bbc1bramish-worlds-squarest-teenagers-sun-channel-4-2035302.html (2010)

13   Available at:
http://www.reelscotland.com/exclusive-interview-paul-mcguigan-on-sherlock/ (2010)

Fig. 4. The "Victorian" characters (illustration from the 1887 edition)

Fig. 5. The characters from the series *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010)

5   From "A study in Scarlet" (Conan Doyle, 1887) to "A study in Pink" (BBC, 2010): studies in the case of translation of the irony in Sherlock from literary text to the audiovisual

Having looked at some of the more important characteristics shared by the two versions, literary and audiovisual, of the narration of Doyle, we analyse the evolution of the irony of the Sherlock character of the 19th century writer's first novel to the first episode of the modern day series.

While we have already looked at an example when referring to Delabastita's classification,[14] we find other relevant cases of irony both in the book "original character" and the television "meta character" who illustrate our study.

From the start of the novel it is easy to recognise explicitly the irony in the protagonist. In his first encounter with Watson, Sherlock, with feigned innocence, gives details of the life of the former even though he has just met him. The details he supplies and the way he does so (adjectives, adverbs and modal expressions) foster a clear superiority with respect to Watson, which provokes an immediate effect of amusement and aesthetic pleasure in the reader on contemplating the workings of the privileged mind of the protagonist.

> "How on earth did you know that?" I asked in astonishment.
>
> "Never mind," said he, chuckling to himself. "The question now is about haemoglobin. No doubt you see the significance of this discovery of mine?"
>
> (Pp. 6–7)

Later going on to clarify:

> (P. 11) "Nothing of the sort. I *knew* you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind, that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate stops. There was such stops however. The train of reasoning ran, 'Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.' The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished."

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14   Dirk Delabastita: "Translation and mass-communication: film and TV translation as evidence of cultural dynamics." In: *Babel* 35 (4) (1989), pp. 193–218.

In the audiovisual narration, this deduction is likewise made through a dialogue, shorter, but with the same superiority of Sherlock with respect to Watson. Here the conversation takes place as a consequence of the decision to share a flat:

> Dr. Watson: We've only just met and we're going to go and look at a flat?
>
> Sherlock: Problem?
>
> Dr. Watson: We don't know a thing about each other. I don't know where we're meeting. I don't even know your name.
>
> Sherlock: I know you're an Army doctor and you've been invalided home from Afghanistan … That's enough to be going on with, don't you think?

Similarly, it is of great interest to reflect the irony demonstrated by both "Sherlocks," the literary and the audiovisual, when interpreting the main clue in the investigation carried out in this story: the discovery of the word *Rache* written at the scene of the crime. Although the filmic narration, as we shall see, alters this part of the story to a certain extent, the use of the ironic resource by the protagonist remains intact and similar in both systems.

In the novel, a man appears dead in a house with no signs of violence or injury. One of the policemen, Inspector Gregson, finds the word *Rache* written in blood near the corpse. The other officer in the case, Inspector Lestrade, arrives at the conclusion that it refers to a female name, *Rachel*, which he tells Sherlock.

> (P. 16) "And what does it mean now that you *have* found it?" asked Gregson in a depreciatory voice.
>
> "Mean? Why, it means that the writer was going to put the female name Rachel, but was disturbed before he or she had time to finish. You mark my words, when this case comes to be cleared up you will find that a woman named Rachel has something to do with it …"

However, Holmes "clears up their confusion" and, with great irony, informs them that in reality it concerns the word *Rache*, "revenge" in German:

> (P. 17) "One other thing, Lestrade," he added, turning round the door. 'Rache' is the German for 'revenge', so don't lose your time looking for Miss Rachel."

With which Parthian shot he walked away, leaving the two rivals open-mouthed behind him.

In the series, however, the corpse is a woman's and it is Sherlock himself who, mocking his literary *alter ego*, makes two deductions about the word found: the first mistaken ("revenge" in German) and the second correct (a woman's name).

The joke the film narration makes with this manipulation of this part of the story is reinforced by the montage technique it uses. The two corre-

sponding interpretations are written over each shot detailing the word written on the floor, as occurs with the above-mentioned text messages.

Fig. 6. Image of 'revenge' in German

Fig. 7. Image of the woman's name

6   Conclusions

Intersemiotic translation has been one of the more researched forms of translation in recent years due to the ever-growing presence of audiovisual texts in modern society.

Literary irony as an expressive rhetorical resource finds its form in the audiovisual text through its two communicative channels: visual and auditory. In this paper we have presented the translation of the irony of Conan Doyle's character into the irony of the protagonist of the series *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010) and it has been confirmed that the latter does not lose the ironic traits which identify the literary character. The faithfulness of the modern version to the literary version is absolute, which entails a guarantee as well as a gesture of complicity with the meta-receivers (of the series), surely avid readers and admirers of the intuitive 19th century investigator.

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