Cunning Punning and Cultural References

Translating the typically British to Swedish
Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to analyse what translation strategies can be used for rendering puns and cultural references, from English into Swedish, found in a text that humorously presents stereotypically British phenomena. The study also aims to determine whether the strategies are mainly source-oriented or target-oriented and to point out some similarities and differences between the translation strategies used for puns and cultural references.

In order to solve the different problems that the puns and cultural references caused, various thesauruses, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and parallel texts have been consulted. The analysis of puns has been based on translation strategies presented by Delabastita (1996) and the analysis of cultural references on strategies presented by Pedersen (2007).

Even if there proved to be some overlaps between Delabastita´s and Pedersen´s sets of strategies, the study confirms that puns and cultural references require quite different approaches and quite different strategies. The chosen approach for rendering puns was relatively free and target-oriented. The source text puns were predominantly rendered by replacing them with target text puns, even if this changed the text significantly. The cultural references, on the other hand, were mainly rendered by using source-oriented strategies. Retention and strategies that include or have been combined with Retention were the most frequently used ones.

Key words: allusive wordplay, culture-specific, puns, source-oriented, target-oriented, Translation Crisis Points, translation strategies
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction  1  
   1.1 Aim  1  
   1.2 Material  2  
   1.3 Method  2  

2. Theoretical background  3  
   2.1 A source-oriented or target-oriented approach  3  
   2.2 Puns and wordplay  4  
   2.3 Cultural references  6  

3. Analysis  8  
   3.1 Puns and wordplay  9  
   3.2 Cultural references  15  
   3.3 A comparison of translation strategies  22  

4. Conclusion  23  

List of references
1. Introduction

As all translators know, translation is not always straightforward. Pedersen (2007:5, 91) uses the phrase ‘Translation Crisis Points’ to label the occasions when the translator “has to stop and think a bit harder, and actively decide what translation strategy to use”. Translation Crisis Points could be “songs, E[xtralinguistic] C[ultural] R[reference]s, poetry, puns and other types of wordplay”.

Before the appropriate translation strategies can be found, there is another important choice for the translator to make. To what extent should the target text be adapted and made accessible to its new readers? If the adaptation goes too far, the target text risks losing touch with the source culture. Whether to choose a source-oriented or a target-oriented approach has been discussed for at least two centuries since the German theologian and translation theorist Schleiermacher (1813/2004: 49) initiated a debate amongst translation theorists by saying, “Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him”.

This paper focuses on issues, or Translation Crisis Points, that the translator may encounter in translation of a text that deals with, and displays, strong national character traits. These issues concern the use of wordplay, mainly in the form of puns, and cultural references. Strategies for rendering puns and cultural references have previously been explored, for example by Delabastita and Pedersen whose studies will form the basis of this paper. To my knowledge, however, the strategies required for this particular type of source text have not been analysed before, neither have the strategies used for puns and cultural references previously been compared.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this paper is to analyse translation problems related to puns and cultural references in translation from English to Swedish of a text on phenomena that are seen as stereotypically British. The paper will discuss

(i) what different translation strategies can be used
(ii) whether the strategies used are mainly source-oriented or target-oriented and
what similarities and differences there are between the strategies used for puns and the strategies used for cultural references.

1.2 Material

The material used for this study is my own translation of about 5,700 words from *The Very Best of British: A humorous collection of all things quirky about Britain and the Brits*. This book was published in 2012 by Igloo Books Ltd, but the author is not specified. The title clearly indicates what the book is about, which is much of what is commonly perceived as typically British. For example, it covers food and drink (fish and chips, Sunday roast and ales with strange names), spectator sports and hobbies (Grand National, Crufts and train spotting) and character traits and habits (a sense of fair play and queuing).

The source text readers could possibly be British people who enjoy laughing about themselves and non-British people with a love of British culture and a good knowledge of the English language. The target text readers ought to be Swedes who love Britain and want to know more about British culture, but who prefer reading in Swedish. The title of the book also reveals something about its style. The book offers humorous and light entertainment and the author uses wordplay and rhetorical devices, such as irony and alliteration, to bring about this impression.

1.3 Method

The analysis has been based on the translation of the first half of *The Very Best of British*. In order to get help with the translations of words and idioms and support for the choices made, several online thesauruses, dictionaries and encyclopaedias were used, as well as various parallel texts found on the Internet. Occasionally, Swedish media websites were consulted to establish what wording had previously been used when typically British events were covered. As the source text contains a large number of references to food, it was also useful to see how the Swedish food magazine *Allt om Mat* had treated names of typically British dishes and sorts of food.

Two areas in the source text proved to be the most challenging ones: puns and cultural references. Examples from these areas have undergone a qualitative analysis to establish what translation strategies can be used in texts such as *The Very Best of British*, whether these strategies are mainly source-oriented or target-oriented and whether there are any similarities
and differences between the strategies used for puns and the strategies used for cultural references. The methods for analysing puns and cultural references are based on descriptions and definitions provided in previous research in the field, which will be presented in chapter 2.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 A source-oriented or target-oriented approach

In the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher (1813/2004:49) took a definite stand on whether to move the reader towards the writer or the writer towards the reader. He supported the former view, arguing that the translator should seek “to impart to the reader the same image, the same impression that he himself received thanks to his knowledge of the original language of the work as it was written, thus moving the reader to his own position, one in fact foreign to him”. In our time, Venuti (1995:4-5) continues in Schleiermacher’s footsteps and is highly critical of the prevailing preference in the United Kingdom and the United States for a fluent, ‘domesticated’ translation discourse. Venuti (1995:23) advocates a ‘foreignizing’ practice of translation, in order to resist “dominant target-language cultural values so as to signify the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text”.

A recent approach to translation, fundamentally opposite of Venuti’s preference for ‘foreignization’, has been coined ‘transcreation’. This term originates from the marketing industry. Scott Bass (2013), founder of Advanced Language Translation Inc., explains in his blog that transcreation “requires looking holistically at a message and adapting it to the target audience”. This adaptation could be extremely free. Bass argues that transcreation resembles rewriting something in one’s own words.

In a fairly recent study of subtitling norms, Pedersen (2007:252-253) rejects Venuti’s classic terms domestication and foreignization for his categorisation of different translation strategies. Pedersen chooses to distinguish between ‘source-oriented’ and ‘target-oriented’ strategies instead. Source-oriented strategies focus on the culture of the source text, whereas target-oriented strategies focus on the culture of the target text. Source-oriented strategies are not identical to foreignizing strategies. The main reason is that they do not rely on linguistic disfluency, something that Venuti recommends in order to let the original text shine through in the translation. When translating books such as The Very Best of British, in my view, the translator ought to strive for fluency; otherwise these books will probably not attract any
readers. However, this does not mean that foreign elements cannot be included in the target text. Accordingly, this paper will mainly use the terms source-oriented and target-oriented. We will see, however, that some of the translation strategies used in the analysed material bear a close resemblance to transcreation.

2.2 Puns and wordplay

According to Newmark (1988:217), puns are most commonly used in the English and Chinese languages. The English punning tradition goes back a long time and the greatest punsters include William Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde and Lewis Carroll. However, puns are still frequently used in our time. Redfern (1984:130) stresses the importance of the pun in newspaper headlines and adverts, but puns can also be found where they might not be expected. This one, for example, is engraved on a tombstone:

Stranger, tread
This ground with gravity:
Dentist Brown is filling
His last cavity.


But what is a pun, actually? Delabastita (1996:128) defines punning, or wordplay, as “the general name 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”. In Redfern’s (1984:15, 82) words, it is “a verbal practical joke” or “a kind of code, which the reader, spectator or hearer is invited to crack”.

Puns can be labelled in different ways but are often divided into four main categories, based on the level of similarity concerning sounds and spelling (Delabastita, 1996:128):

(i) ‘homonymy’ (identical sounds and spelling)
(ii) ‘homophony’ (identical sounds but different spellings)
(iii) ‘homography’ (different sounds but identical spellings)
(iv) ‘paronymy’ (there are slight differences in both spelling and sound)

Examples of homonyms can be found in the pun on the dentist´s gravestone above. Cavity can mean a hole in the ground as well as a decayed part of a tooth. These two meanings of cavity are related, as both of them refer to some kind of hole. However, there are also homonymous words that are not related at all, such as the verb park, as in park one´ s car, and the noun with
the same spelling and pronunciation, which means a ‘public garden’. *Hair* (that grows on your head) and *hare* (the animal) are examples of homophones, while *bow* (‘bend down’) and *bow* (which, together with an arrow, is used as a weapon) are homographs, and *accept* (‘take something offered’) and *except* (‘not including’) are paronyms.

This paper will, however, analyse one more type of pun, or wordplay, which differs from the four categories mentioned above:

(v) ‘allusive wordplay’

Allusive wordplay actually builds a bridge between the two parts of this paper, puns and cultural references, as it depends on culture-specific knowledge. According to Leppihalme (1997:197) allusions are problematic as they can lead to ‘culture bumps’; if they are literally translated and their connotations ignored, the target readers will find the renderings confusing. Before a suitable translation can be worked upon at all, the instances of allusive wordplay in the source text have to be spotted, which, Leppihalme (1996:207) maintains, is a problem in itself for the non-native translator.

Leppihalme (1996:200) explains allusive wordplay as a modification of a frame, i.e. “a combination of words that is more or less fixed in the minds of a group of language users”, which could be proverbs, catchphrases, idioms or allusions, for example. Let us take a look at one of Leppihalme’s (1996:206) examples of allusive wordplay. In *Newsweek* (15.8.1994), there was a headline that said: “All airports were not Created Equal”. In this case, the American *Declaration of Independence* was the frame that had been modified. The original wording is, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal”. The modifications can be very different in character, and Leppihalme (1996:201-202) divides them into syntactic modifications and lexical substitutions. In the example quoted above there has been a lexical substitution since *men* have been replaced with *airports*.

Puns, on the whole, are difficult to translate and there has been great debate whether they could be translated at all. Delabastita (1996:134), however, argues that there are several methods available for the translator to use when encountering a pun, which can be seen below:

- PUN > PUN: “the source-text pun is translated by a target-language pun”
- PUN > NON-PUN: “the pun is rendered by a non-punning phrase which may salvage both senses of the wordplay but in a non-punning conjunction, or select one of the senses at the cost of suppressing the other”
• PUN > RELATED RHETORICAL DEVICE: “the pun is replaced by some wordplay-related rhetorical device (repetition, alliteration, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony, paradox etc.)”
• PUN > ZERO: “the portion of text containing the pun is simply omitted”
• PUN ST = PUN TT: “the translator reproduces the source-text pun [. . .] in its original formulation, i.e. without actually ‘translating’ it”
• NON-PUN > PUN: “the translator introduces a pun [. . .] to make up for source-text puns lost elsewhere, or for any other reason”
• ZERO > PUN: “totally new material is added”
• EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES: “explanatory footnotes or endnotes, comments” etc.

Delabastita´s taxonomy will be applied and critically discussed in the analysis of the translation of puns.

2.3 Cultural references

Whereas puns sometimes involve culture-specific knowledge, cultural references always do. But what is culture? Newmark (1988:94) defines it as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”.

References to culture may create a major stumbling block, or a Translation Crisis Point, for the translator. Pedersen (2007:91, 96) points out that it is perfectly possible to know a foreign language very well but not having any knowledge of the culture that uses the language. For his study of Scandinavian subtitling, he has coined his own term – ‘Extralinguistic Cultural References’ – to stress that the cultural references he has analysed are references to phenomena outside of language. Pedersen mentions references to places, people, institutions, customs and food as examples of Extralinguistic Cultural References. For reasons of simplicity, this study will use the shorter term: ‘cultural references’.

In the search for a possible model for analysing cultural references in this paper, a model created by Pedersen (2007: 130-149), which was used in the above-mentioned study, was chosen. This model proved particularly useful, as it was created specifically for the study of cultural references.\(^1\) Table 1 gives an overview of Pedersen´s taxonomy, which has been slightly modified to suit the analytical needs of this study. While Pedersen uses two types of

\(^1\) Vinay and Darbelnet´s (1995:31-42) classic taxonomy was rejected due to the fact that two of their main procedures – transposition and modulation – cover syntactic changes, not useful for analysing cultural references.
Substitution – ‘Cultural Substitution’ and ‘Situational Substitution’ – this study only uses the former. Table 1 is followed by a more detailed description of each category.

**Table 1** Pedersen’s model for translating cultural references, modified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source-oriented strategies</th>
<th>Target-oriented strategies</th>
<th>Neither source-oriented nor target-oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Addition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Completion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct Translation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generalization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Superordinate Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Paraphrase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Substitution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Omission</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using an Official Equivalent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen above, Pedersen (2007:129) classifies the first three strategies – Retention, Specification and Direct Translation – as source-oriented, whereas the following three – Generalization, Substitution and Omission – are target-oriented. Using an Official Equivalent belongs to neither group. The categories are explained as follows:

‘Retention’ means that the source text element is kept in the target text. The retained word or words could be put within quotation marks or italicised and possibly slightly changed, e.g. in spelling (Pedersen, 2007:130-131).

‘Specification’ implies that the cultural reference is kept, without translating it, but that information is also added. One sub-category is ‘Completion’, when information that is latent in the cultural reference is added. For example, acronyms and abbreviations could be spelt out or a person’s Christian name may be added. In one example from Pedersen’s study an American source text only uses *Brown* whereas the Danish target text spells it out as *Brown University*. The other sub-category is ‘Addition’. This strategy also implies adding latent information, but the information in this case only exists “as part of the sense or connotations” of the cultural reference. Pedersen’s English source text example involves a name, *Ian*
Botham. In the Swedish target text, the epithet Cricketspelaren (‘the cricket player’) has been added (Pedersen, 2007:132).

‘Direct translation’ means that the source language expression is translated, more or less, word-for-word. For example, the American film title, the Purple Heart is called Purpurhjärta in Swedish (ST: purple > TT: purpur + ST: heart > TT: hjärta) (Pedersen, 2007:135).

‘Generalization’ replaces something specific with something general. The first sub-category is using a ‘Superordinate term’. In Pedersen’s example, a specific American comedy act – the Three Stooges – has been replaced with a more general term – underhållning (‘entertainment’) – in the Swedish target text. The second sub-category of Generalization is ‘Paraphrase’, which means that the cultural reference in the source text is rendered with a phrase that means, more or less, the same thing but is less specific. In Pedersen’s example, the English source text expression the V.E. Day celebrations is paraphrased as firandet av kapitulationen i andra världskriget in the Swedish target text (Pedersen, 2007:137, 140, 213).

‘Cultural Substitution’ implies deleting the cultural reference found in the source text and either replacing it with a reference that exists in the target culture or with a cultural reference from the source culture, or a third culture, that is better known. One of Pedersen’s examples involves replacing the American expression the Prison board with the Swedish expression Kriminalvårdsstyrelsen (Pedersen, 2007:141-147).

‘Omission’ means that the cultural reference is completely deleted. This strategy could be chosen either responsibly, after trying hard to find a suitable translation, or irresponsibly, out of laziness. Pedersen evaluates Omission as the most target-oriented strategy of them all; the foreign item is not present in the target text in any form (Pedersen, 2007:148).

Using an ‘Official Equivalent’ is described by Pedersen as a “ready-made solution” and he argues that this strategy differs from the other as it is not a linguistic process but rather an administrative one. Conversions of measurements belong to this category and also the rendering of Donald Duck as Kalle Anka in Swedish (Pedersen, 2007:149, 151).

3. Analysis

As seen in the introduction, two of the main sub-categories of Pedersen’s so called Translation Crisis Points are puns and cultural references. In this section, different examples of puns and cultural references from The Very Best of British will be analysed and discussed.
Section 3.1 deals with the different translation strategies for puns and section 3.2 with the strategies for cultural references. Each section will first provide an overview of the strategies used in the form of a table followed by an analysis of a selection of examples. These examples have been selected as representative illustrations of what different translation strategies can be used. Finally, in section 3.3, the strategies for rendering puns and the strategies used to translate cultural references will be compared.

### 3.1 Puns and wordplay

Even if there were no more than 14 puns in the source text, rendering these puns required a lot of time, effort and imagination. Consequently, Pedersen appears to be quite right in calling puns Translation Crisis Points. The different puns in the source text called for different translation strategies. Table 2 below shows how these strategies were distributed.

**Table 2: The distribution of translation strategies for puns based on Delabastita’s taxonomy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PUN &gt; PUN</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUN &gt; NON-PUN</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUN &gt; RELATED RHETORICALDEVICE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUN &gt; ZERO</td>
<td>1²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUN ST = PUN TT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-PUN &gt; PUN</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZERO &gt; PUN</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table clearly shows that PUN > PUN was the dominant strategy.

The different translation strategies for puns will be exemplified in sections 3.1.1 – 3.1.5. The examples will also illustrate what different *types* of puns were found in the source text. All the puns could be categorised by using Delabastita’s taxonomy. One of the puns was rendered with a combination of two translation strategies – see 3.1.5 below. Section 3.1.6 will attempt to tie together the different findings in section 3.1.

² It is questionable whether example 5, section 3.1.4, actually contains a pun.
3.1.1 PUN > PUN

As we have already seen, rendering a source text pun with a target text pun was undoubtedly the most frequently represented strategy in the analysed material. Several of these puns were based on allusive wordplay. As mentioned above, it implies that a frame, such as an idiom, proverb, catchphrase or allusion, has been modified. Leppihalme (1996:214) argues that the translation of allusive wordplay is more of a cultural problem than a linguistic one and sometimes almost impossible to tackle. The instances of allusive wordplay in The Very Best of British, however, are mainly based on well-known idioms. This way the task of finding suitable target text renderings was not as difficult as it would have been, had the allusions been to passages in books, films or advertisements, for example. When searching for suitable translations of idioms, there are many dictionaries for the translator to consult.

The frame in example (1) is the idiom saying that somebody’s bark is worse than their bite, meaning that “someone’s fierce and intimidating manner does not reflect their true nature” (Oxford English Dictionary):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dog Lovers</th>
<th>Hundälskare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actually, its bite is worse than its bark</td>
<td>Utställningen som lockar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>hund-ratusentals besökare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the example above, the frame has been modified in that two words, bark and bite, have changed places. By doing so, the whole idiom has been changed from positive to negative. As this piece of text concerns Crufts, the dog show, the idiom has naturally been chosen due to its dog theme. In Swedish there is no equivalent to the original source text idiom. There was the option to render the pun by using a Swedish proverb – Det ligger en hund begraven – but it proved difficult to find any link between the proverb and the text content. Finally, the chosen strategy involved playing around with the word hund (‘dog’), as part of the word hund-ratusentals. By doing so, the link between the heading – the dog lovers – and the subheading – the description of them – is lost. This is compensated by linking the subheading to another aspect found in the text below it, namely that Crufts attracts 150,000 visitors every year.

The source text pun in example (2) is based on the idiomatic expression saying that someone, or maybe something, can be a pillar of society:
The classic red post boxes are almost synonymous with Britain. As they are pillar shaped, they are called pillar boxes. The link between the topic of post boxes and the idiomatic expression, a pillar of society, is the word pillar. According to Oxford English Dictionary, one of the meanings of pillar is a “person or thing regarded as reliably providing essential support for something”. The pun in the source text is really well chosen. Even if the pillar boxes could have been more practical, the British people love their iconic post boxes and rely on them. The Swedish equivalent to being a pillar of society is samhällets stöttepelare. As there is no link between the Swedish version of the idiom and post boxes, a direct translation was not an option if a pun was to be maintained. However, it was possible to create a pun based on one of the two parts of the compound word, post + låda. At first, expressions containing post, such as stå på or falla på sin post, were considered but the final choice contained låda, as a part of the idiom hålla låda, meaning ‘talk about’. Even if the source text and target text idioms differ from each other, they both imply that the post box is something important. Example (2) may not be the most typical example of allusive wordplay, as the frame, i.e. the idiom, has actually not been modified at all. However, Leppihalme (1996:200) argues that frames are not always linguistically modified but they can be modified situationally instead.

3.1.2 PUN > NON-PUN

The strategy PUN > NON-PUN was used twice. Example (3) has been chosen to illustrate this strategy:

It is safe to say that the British and pubs go together like a coach and horses; to imagine life without a local would be like a dog without a duck.  

Man kan lugnt säga att britterna och pubarna hör ihop; att tänka sig ett liv utan en kvarterspub vore som en skiva bacon utan ett ägg eller som ett glas utan något öl.

Example (3) actually contains two puns – like a coach and horses and like a dog without a duck – but they will be treated as one as they belong together. These puns can be labelled allusive wordplay as they are based on allusions to typical British pub names, the Coach and
Horses and the Dog and Duck. In Sweden, pubs have never been such a natural part of everyday life as they always have been in Britain. Swedish pubs often mimic British ones and are given British names, but even if there was, for example, a pub called the Coach and Horses in Sweden, the phrase would never have the same connotations in the target culture as it has in the source culture. Keeping the references to the pub names was therefore not an option. The first part of the sentence was rendered by simply omitting the simile – like a coach and horses – which includes the pun. The second part also omits the pun but replaces the punning simile – like a dog without a duck – with two other similes. The first one contains two things that normally go together and would be known by both the source culture and the target culture, namely bacon and eggs: att tänka sig ett liv utan en kvarterspub vore som en skiva bacon utan ett ägg. A second simile was also added as a link to the topic of the section, beer: (att tänka sig ett liv utan en kvarterspub vore) som ett glas utan något öl. Adding a second simile might be seen as compensation for the simile that was lost in the first part of the sentence.

3.1.3 PUN > RELATED RHETORICAL DEVICE

Not only pub names, but also names of different ales can apparently contain puns, which can be seen in example (4). In this case the pun has been replaced with alliteration:

an intriguing array of real ale with names like Auld Fursty Badger
(4) ett fascinerande utbud av färsköl, eller ”real ale”, med namn som Gammal Groggy Grävling

In Auld Fursty Badger, the pun is based on a paronym: fursty. This word has been created by combining furry and thirsty. The paronym is not far from being a homonym, as some people might actually pronounce thirsty as fursty. A similarly clever Swedish combination of hårig and törstig, or of any related words, proved impossible to create. However, alliteration was a possibility. Auld could be rendered as gammal and badger as grävling – now there was only one word left that had to start with the letter G. At first, the name Gammal Grumlig Grävling, was considered, which could be used to describe the beer, but finally a rendering that was closer to the original name was chosen – Gammal Groggy Grävling; too much thirst may result in a groggy feeling. In order to ascertain that the made-up name was plausible, the Internet was consulted. Apparently there is a brewery called Badger Brewery that produces
Their use of alliteration supported the choice of alliteration in the target text.

3.1.4 **PUN > ZERO**

On one occasion, a possible source text pun had to be completely omitted from the target text. This can be seen in example (5), taken from a section on horse betting:

> predicting the eventual outcome requires more than skill, judgement and study of the form guide. […] other factors come into consideration; factors such as: […]

> What colour will the jockeys be wearing?
> Do any of the names have a coincidental connection or significance? Is the jockey good-looking? Is there a grey horse that'll stand out on the telly? *Should I use an actual pin or will any sharp pointy object do?*

The italicised sentence shows signs of being a pun based on homonymy. In the source text, *pin* appears to be treated incorrectly as a synonym of *needle*. There could be another type of *pin* used in the horse betting business. Despite considerable research, information about this other possible *pin* could not be found and the sentence was consequently omitted. Even though omission is never satisfying, the target text will probably not suffer from it in this case, as no other sentences depend on the omitted one.

Delabastita (1996:134-135) argues that many critics would not see strategies such as PUN > ZERO, PUN > EXPLANATORY FOOTNOTE and NON-PUN > PUN as legitimate translation techniques, disregarding the fact that even the most celebrated translators have often used them in real life. In real life, this is also true for the humble novice.

3.1.5 **PUN ST = PUN TT + EDITORIAL TECHNIQUE**

Delabastita (1996:134) stresses the fact that the translation techniques can be combined in several different ways to render a pun. In example (6), the source text pun has been retained in
its original form, but an explanatory footnote has also been added in order to aid the target readers. The example contains a joke that is used to illustrate the use of British dialects and this joke is totally dependent on a pun:

\[(6)\]

McDougal is weaving unsteadily down Argyle Street when he spots a man under the bonnet of a car…

‘What’s up Jimmy?’

‘Piston broke’

‘Aye, same here’.

McDougal snubblar ostadigt fram på Argyle Street, då han får syn på en man under motorhuven till en bil…

“Hur är det, Jimmy?”

“Piston broke”¹

“Samma problem här”.

¹ På dialet uttalas ”Piston broke” (”Motorkolven gick sönder”) och ”Pissed and broke” (”Full och pank”) på samma sätt.

This pun is homophonic; using dialect, Piston broke (‘Motorkolven gick sönder’) and Pissed and broke (‘Full och pank’) would sound equal: [’pistən brəʊk]. Replacing this source text pun with a target text pun is not a suitable strategy, as that would totally remove the target reader from the streets of the source culture. Newmark (1988:217) argues that puns used to illustrate language usually require a combination of transference, translation and explanation. Keeping the English expression in its untranslated form gives the reader an illustration of what English dialects really sound like. As the target readers may require some help to be able to understand the pun, the English quotation is followed by an explanatory footnote, which also includes a direct translation of the two senses of the pun.

### 3.1.6 Discussion

As seen above, most source text puns were replaced by target text puns. This strategy was used whenever possible. However, this process was not straightforward. Firstly, the puns had to be identified and distinguished from ‘normal’ expressions and phrases, and even if the pun was identified, it was not always possible to understand its meaning. Secondly, creating puns is not a simple task. Can a novice translator, without any previous experience of punning, create puns that are good enough? How would the potential target readers react? Delabastita (1996:135) asks himself a similar question, “Can the translator allow him/herself to get carried away by free associations without jeopardizing the text’s chances of favourable acceptance, or is it safer to play the punning down?” In my view, whether to try using the
strategy PUN > PUN or not partly depends on the quality of the source text. If the source text author is not an accomplished, well-known punster, the translator may give punning a try.

Whether to replace source text puns with target text puns also depends on what the translator wants to achieve with the target text. As The Very Best of British was translated, the overall approach was largely source-oriented, attempting to be as faithful to the source text as possible, albeit without compromising readability and comprehension. Replacing source text puns with target text puns has, however, prompted some major changes. Delabastita (1996:135) recognises this problem:

Source-oriented translators tend to perceive this state of affairs in terms of a dilemma, the uncomfortable choice being between giving the wordplay up in its original textual position and somehow providing a more or less free adaptation. In other words, the only way to be faithful to the original text (i.e. to its verbal playfulness) is paradoxically to be unfaithful to it (i.e. to its vocabulary and grammar). Source-oriented translators caught up in this double-bind situation are in effect forced into momentarily lifting the requirements of fidelity and leaving the matter to be decided by pragmatic considerations.

In order to retain the sense of ‘Britishness’ that permeates the source text, which partly depends on the typically British use of puns, ‘verbal playfulness’ has been put before faithfulness in the target text, and the method for translating puns has, in fact, much in common with transcreation.

3.2 Cultural references

The source text contains a large number of cultural references, such as references to food, popular culture, national events, measurements and acronyms. Pedersen’s taxonomy proved to be a very useful basis for categorisation. However, despite a thorough comparison with the examples in Scandinavian Subtitles, two examples of cultural references were not possible to categorise. This is a problem that is also acknowledged by Pedersen (2007:130). In addition, sometimes more than one strategy was necessary to solve a Translation Crisis Point.

Table 3 below shows the distribution of cultural references. In sections 3.2.1 – 3.2.6 the different translation strategies will be exemplified and arguments for the different choices of strategies will be presented. Finally, section 3.2.7 aims at drawing some overall conclusions.
Table 3: The distribution of translation strategies for cultural references based on a modified version of Pedersen’s taxonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source- or target-oriented</th>
<th>Main category</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source-oriented</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specification</td>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Completion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct Translation</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retention + Direct Translation</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct Translation + Specification</td>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target-oriented</td>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Superordinate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Omission</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither source- nor target-oriented</td>
<td>Official Equivalent</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source-oriented + target-oriented</td>
<td>Retention + Generalization</td>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not possible to categorise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.1 Retention and Specification

As seen in Table 3, Retention has been the most commonly used strategy in the analysed material. When considering Retention, translators must ask themselves if this word, phrase or name is known by the majority of the target readers and if it can be used without any further explanation. Using Pedersen’s (2007:156) words, it is necessary to determine “the degree of Transculturality”. This is the case, for example, when the source text contains allusions to national events. Three such events, the Proms, Wimbledon and Royal Ascot, can be found in example (7), two of which – Wimbledon and Royal Ascot – will be discussed below.

The Prime Minister regards the Proms as a “bastion of Britishness”. Nobody quite

Premiärministern ser “the Proms” som en “bastion av brittiskhet”. Ingen vet riktigt

(7)
knows what he means but it’s a phrase also used for Wimbledon, Royal Ascot

vad han menar men det är en fras som även använts om Wimbledon, galopptävlingen Royal Ascot

Of these events, the Swedish target readers ought to be the most familiar with the tennis tournament, Wimbledon. Every year, Swedish national television broadcasts live matches and the sports sections of the major national newspapers also cover Wimbledon [www]. Referring to Wimbledon as tennisturneringen Wimbledon, thus choosing the strategy Specification, more specifically its sub-category Addition, would be an unnecessary intervention by the translator. Ingo (2007:135) points out that supplementation could make a text banal and heavy and Pedersen (2007:135) argues that the target readers could regard Specification as patronising. Consequently, a simple Retention was the chosen strategy.

Royal Ascot, however, is probably not an equally well-known event amongst the target readers. One indication in support of this view is Aftonbladet’s choice of adding facts from Nationalencyklopedin about the event in one of their articles on hats worn at Royal Ascot in 2013. Another indication might be Svenska Dagbladet’s use of the epithet galopptävlingen prior to Royal Ascot in an article on British dress code from 2008. Therefore, Specification/Addition seemed to be the most suitable strategy for rendering Royal Ascot and galopptävlingen was added to the phrase.

The second sub-category of Specification, i.e. Completion, was rarely used in the analysed material but can be seen in example (8):

(8) This annual dog show, held at the NEC in Birmingham, attracts approximately 23,000 dogs [. . .]

Denna årliga hundutställning, som äger rum på National Exhibition Centre (NEC) i Birmingham, lockar ungefär 23 000 hundar [. . .]

It was his 4 berth caravan, which was blocking the exit of the NEC car park.

Det var hans fyrbäddshusvagn som blockerade utfarten till NEC:s parkering.

Acronyms sometimes constitute Translation Crisis Points and need to undergo changes as they are rendered. Ingo (2007:123) claims that there is often a pragmatic need for additions in order to make the text comprehensible to the reader. The NEC, in example (8), is most likely known to the majority of the British, as it apparently is the largest exhibition centre in England [www]. Most Swedes, however, have probably never heard of it and spelling out the
acronym ought to improve readability. Although the name is not translated into the target language, two of its components, National and Centre, are very similar to their Swedish equivalents. If the NEC had only been mentioned once in the source text, the acronym (within parentheses) would probably not have been necessary to retain. This was, however, done to avoid an awkward translation later in the text: Det var hans fyrbäddshusvagn som blockerade utfarten till National Exhibition Centres parkering.

3.2.2 Direct Translation

The final source-oriented strategy is Direct Translation. Three instances of this strategy are found in example (9):

(9) The British Museum, The Natural History Museum, Doncaster Bobble Hat Museum, Dalkeith’s interactive Marbles Museum and Garden Spade World in Cardiff all jostle to attract their share of visitors.

The example is taken from a passage where the author is mocking the museums in Britain. The first two museums are possibly known to quite a few target readers. Swedish travel websites, such as reseatlas.se, mention them. Reseguiden.se even calls The British Museum one of the top eight sights of London that are free of charge. Using Retention in these two cases is the most natural choice. The next three museums, however, are different. In fact, they seem to be non-existent, possibly made up by the author to illustrate what silly museums exist in Britain. Using Retention in these cases would be inadvisable, as some parts of the names, e.g. bobble hat and marbles, could be quite difficult for the average Swede to understand and the author’s irony would be lost. Direct Translation was therefore the chosen strategy.

3.2.3 Generalization

Generalization is the first target-oriented strategy in Pedersen’s list. It can be divided into two sub-categories, the first of which is using a Superordinate Term. In example (10), which discusses the British habit of panic buying unnecessary food in the run-up to Christmas, a Superordinate Term has replaced a hyponym:
And why just buy one packet of *Eat Me Dates*? Och varför bara köpa ett paket *dadlar*?

*Eat Me Dates* is a cheap brand of dates which is sold by all the major supermarket chains in Britain [www]. This brand name is probably unknown in Sweden and does not have any connotations of being a budget variety of dates; therefore, there would be little reason for the translator to keep the name. One option could be using Cultural Substitution, replacing *Eat Me Dates* with a Swedish low-budget brand name instead, for example *Eldorado*. That would have implied using Cultural Substitution. This strategy, however, would remove the act of panic buying from Britain and place it in Sweden instead. Even though Swedes also tend to panic buy, Sweden is not the topic of the source text. Finally, Generalization/Superordinate Term was the chosen strategy; the brand name was removed but the *dates* were kept in their translated form: *dadlar*. This is a target-oriented strategy but, in my view, less so than Cultural Substitution, as the dates have not been removed from their original setting, i.e. Britain.

The second sub-category of Generalization, Paraphrase, was never used on its own in the material, only in combination with Retention, which can be seen in example (11) below. Pedersen (2007:130) confirms that strategies sometimes have to be combined in order to solve Translation Crisis Points.

References to food constitute the most common category of cultural references in the analysed material, in example (11) represented by *scotch eggs*. In Britain, *scotch eggs* are typically brought along on picnics and hikes and are easy to find on the supermarket shelves. The only Swedes that know of *scotch eggs* are probably those who have come across these eggs on trips to Britain. When translating this expression, some kind of explanation to help the target readers visualise the dish would be preferable. *Allt om Mat* explains a *scotch egg* as “krämigt ägg inbakat i korvfärs med smak av salvia och muskot”. If *scotch eggs* had been the topic of a longer section of the text, a more detailed description may have been considered. As this was not the case, a shorter Generalization/Paraphrase – *inbakade ägg* (placed within parentheses)
– was used. Rendering *scotch eggs* with only this Paraphrase could have been an option. However, just because *scotch eggs* are so quintessentially British and maybe also to help future Swedes travelling to Britain to find and try this dish, Retention, i.e. transferring the English word in its original form to the target text, has also been used.

3.2.4 **Cultural Substitution**

Pedersen’s original typology of translation strategies includes two types of Substitution: Cultural Substitution and Situational Substitution. The material in this study lacked instances of Situational Substitution and this strategy will therefore not be discussed. Only a handful of Cultural Substitutions were found in the source text. One of these can be seen in example (12):

A regular car boot event will feature up to 100 cars, one burger van and one Portaloo. På en genomsnittlig bakluckeloppis brukar det finnas upp emot 100 bilar, en hamburgervagn och en bajamaja.

In the example above, a cultural reference from the source culture – *Portaloo* – has been replaced with a cultural reference from the target culture – *bajamaja*. A Portaloo is “a portable building containing a toilet” (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and it is a British trademark. Swedish portable buildings containing toilets are generally called *bajamajor*. Cultural Substitutions have generally been avoided, as this strategy could result in a target text that loses touch with the source culture. However, this ought to be no problem in example (12).

3.2.5 **Omission**

Omissions were generally avoided in the translation. On one occasion, however, Omission was the preferred strategy. In example (13) a title has been omitted in the target text:

The Best of Breed in the Flat Haired Retriever Group was originally awarded to Northern Lights Superior Goldenmist Buccaneer Comet Masterpiece, owned by a Mr. G Bullard of Penrith. Från början utsågs *Northern Lights Superior Goldenmist Buccaneer Comet Masterpiece*, ägd av G Bullard från Penrith, till Bäst i Rasen i flatcoated retrievergruppen.
Titles, such as Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms, are still common in Britain. Since the end of the 1960’s, titles are rarely used in Sweden (Nationalencyklopedin). Examples of previous translations of Mr, found in the online dictionary bab.la, revealed that the title is normally either replaced with the person’s Christian name or completely deleted. As Mr. Bullard’s Christian name is unknown, referring to him as G Bullard was the only option. The fact that the gender of G Bullard is lost is not a problem, since it is not significant for the context. Furthermore, there is every indication that Mr. Bullard only exists in the author’s imagination.

3.2.6 Using an Official Equivalent

Pedersen’s final translation strategy, using an Official Equivalent, is classified as neither source-oriented nor target-oriented. Measurements are very often rendered by using this strategy, which can be seen in example (14). However, the example also shows that this is not always true:

(14) With a range of seven miles on a full charge, the T400i ‘Whisper’ is effortlessly able to overtake caravans, boasts a 0-3 mph in 38 seconds and can carry 12,000 pints of milk

När T400i “Whisper” är fulladdad räcker batterierna i drygt en mil; den kör om husvagnar utan någon som helst ansträngning, accelererar 0-5 km/h på 38 sekunder och kan frakta 12 000 pintflaskor med mjölk

The extract is taken from a part of the source text where the author is mocking the milkman’s vehicle. Two units of measure are represented: miles and pints. Even though the British were supposed to switch from the British imperial system to the metric system in 1965 (Encyclopaedia Britannica), it has been a slow process and the old system is often still in use. In Sweden, on the other hand, the metric system has been used for a very long time. Pedersen (2007:149) points out that Official Equivalents are dependent on official decisions from some kind of authority. In Scandinavia, the parliaments have decided that the metric system must be used. Consequently, miles are normally converted into Swedish miles (‘mil’) and kilometres and pints into litres, as these measurements are rendered into Swedish.

It is not difficult for the translator to find measurement converters. In Encyclopaedia Britannica, for example, we can learn that one mile equals 1.609 kilometres. In the extract above, 0-3 mph was rendered as 0-5 km/h and seven miles as drygt en mil (‘slightly more than one Swedish mile’). In my opinion, using the exact figure would not benefit the text, and
Newmark (1988:218) also recommends using approximate figures in the source text if approximate figures are used in the target text.

Example (14), however, also contains a unit of measure that has not been converted, more precisely, the imperial pint unit. Newmark (1988:218) argues that the choice between converting and transferring units of measure is a question of whether to retain local colour or not. If the translator only wanted to convey the actual amount of milk that could be transported in the milkman’s vehicle, the 12,000 pints of milk could have been converted into litres. However, if the aim is to convey what is typically British, i.e. that milk is transported in glass bottles, it would be preferable to use Specification/Addition, i.e. retaining the British unit and adding *flaskor* to the term. Another argument for not converting pints into litres is that many Swedes probably have quite a good idea of how much a pint contains, as many Swedish pubs measure beer in pints.

### 3.2.7 Discussion

As seen above, the most commonly used strategy for rendering cultural references in *The Very Best of British* has been Retention. As Retention is also included in Specification, it is even more common than one might think. Moreover, most of the examples of translation strategies that have been combined include Retention.

Retention and Specification are both source-oriented strategies which focus on the culture of the source text. The choice of using predominantly source-oriented strategies, avoiding the target-oriented ones, has been intentional. Retaining the English expressions, not often adapting the text to Swedish circumstances, will hopefully help to retain the overall sense of ‘Britishness’ in this immensely British source text. One could argue that the preference for source-oriented strategies may compromise the understanding of the target text. In my opinion, however, this does not have to be true. Even if Specification, especially its sub-category Addition, is a source-oriented strategy, it clearly helps the readers understand the target text. It achieves this without removing the text from its original setting and culture, which makes Specification an immensely useful translation strategy.

### 3.3 A comparison of translation strategies

The analysis confirmed the initial assumption that puns and cultural references require very different translation strategies. Admittedly, there are strategies that overlap. PUN > ZERO could be compared to Omission as the two strategies remove the Translation Crisis Point from
the target text. Equally, PUN ST = PUN TT could just as well be called Retention as both strategies keep the source text element in its original form. In my view, PUN > ZERO and Omission are both target-oriented strategies that the translator generally should avoid, if possible. As seen in the analysis above, the source-oriented strategy Retention works very well for rendering cultural references, either on its own, or as a part of another strategy, or in combination with another strategy. However, the corresponding strategy for puns, PUN ST = PUN TT, cannot be used as frequently. Just leaving the pun untranslated would deprive many readers from the satisfaction of a joke and a target text reader with little knowledge of English may feel left out. The strategy of combining the pun with EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES, thus offering aid in a similar way as when Retention is combined with another ‘explanatory’ strategy, cannot be used too often as this would create a non-fluent, limping target text.

In my view, the main difference between the two sets of strategies is that the majority of strategies for puns offer much more ‘artistic freedom’ in translation. The end result of using PUN > PUN in particular is altogether dependent on the translator’s imagination and creativity. As far as freedom from the original source text wording is concerned, there is only one strategy for rendering cultural references that comes close to the freer strategies for puns, namely Substitution. However, this strategy would seldom be the translator’s first choice.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to analyse what strategies can be used for translating puns and cultural references, to determine whether the strategies are mainly source-oriented or target-oriented and to establish whether there are any differences or similarities between the two sets of strategies. For the translation of puns, a taxonomy presented by Delabastita was chosen, whereas the translation of cultural references was based on a taxonomy created by Pedersen.

The result of the study shows that most of Delabastita’s translation strategies for puns could be used and were used as the source text was translated into Swedish. However, one strategy was clearly dominant: PUN > PUN, i.e. rendering a source text pun with a target text pun. This strategy was chosen to maintain the ‘verbal playfulness’ of the source text, even if it often prompted quite substantial textual changes. Consequently, a source-oriented approach proved impossible when dealing with puns and the method used has more in common with transcreation.
Whereas the puns could not be rendered by using mainly source-oriented strategies, the cultural references could and were. All of Pedersen’s main categories of translation strategies were represented in the analysed material — and often two strategies were combined – but the predominant ones include Retention, i.e. the original English word or phrase has been kept. By using Retention the overall sense of ‘Britishness’ could also be retained, and the Swedish target readers would be able to experience their own ‘slice of Britain’.

Early on in the project, the first assumption that the puns and the cultural references required different strategies was confirmed. Admittedly, there proved to be some overlaps between the two sets of strategies, but they were few; Delabastita’s strategy PUN > ZERO corresponds to Pedersen’s Omission, and PUN ST = PUN TT corresponds to Retention.

Every research project has its strengths and weaknesses. This paper presents a fresh approach on the study of translation strategies for rendering puns and cultural references, and it attempts to compare these strategies with each other. Another advantage is that a fairly recent set of translation strategies for cultural references has been tested, whereas many previous studies have been based on classic ones, such as Vinay and Darbelnet’s. Thanks to Pedersen’s extensive analysis in Scandinavian Subtitles, it was not difficult to find support for the choice of strategies for cultural references. However, as Delabastita’s taxonomy for puns, presented in The Translator, was not accompanied by any examples or analysis, the empirical support for this section is weaker. In the future, it would be especially interesting to see how Delabastita’s strategies can be used and developed in a bigger research project. For the time being, this brief analysis gives some food for thought.
List of references

Primary source

Secondary sources
The List [Online] “NEC”. Available at: http://www.list.co.uk/place/52354-nec/ [Accessed 1 May 2014]


Parallel texts


