Humor theory and translation research: Proper names in humorous discourse

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of comparing source and target text jabs (from Raymond Chandler’s novels translated into Greek) involving allusive Proper Names, with a view to accounting for the contribution of this grammatical category to humorous effect. The Proper Names discussed are socioculturally bound. Therefore, the difference in production dates, sociocultural environment, and audience design has resulted in different strategies being adopted for their intercultural transference. This has provided the opportunity to check the traditional strategies against respondents’ reactions to humorous effect and compare source text and alternative target text jabs using the GTVH metric. Considering also the Cognitive Grammar account of the functions of Proper Names (PNs) has led to an interpretation of the unexpected finding that jabs with allusive PNs may well be humorously effective even if their referents are unknown to the audience. The following factors emerge as crucial in this respect: the brevity of the linguistic sign, the specificity and concreteness of the evoked scripts, and the immediacy with which mental contact is established. It is suggested that replacing socioculturally-bound PNs in translating jab lines may jeopardize their humorous effect.

Keywords: Allusive Proper Names; interlingual humor transference; GTVH; Cognitive Linguistics.

Introduction

In a very illuminating assessment of the meanings and the means of (re)constructing humor, Vandaele (2002: 150) focuses on the major problems for the humor translator, namely:
1. the difference between recognizing and reproducing humor ("a sensitive decoder of humor is not necessarily an inspired or talented reproducer of it" [ibid.: 169])
2. the interpersonal difference in humor appreciation.

Despite these problems, we can work toward constructing "an explicit basis for the comparison, justification or evaluation" of target texts (i.e. translated texts) analyzing the linguistic encodings of humorous effects and the structures involved in those effects (Vandaele, ibid.). This paper is a step in this direction. It focuses on the contribution of proper names (PNs) to the humorous effect of jab lines, incorporating insights from Humor Theory (especially Attardo 1994, 1997, 2001), Cognitive Linguistics (especially Langacker 1987, 1991; Marmaridou 1992) and Translation research (especially Leppihalme 1997). It attempts to provide an account of the humorous potential of PNs as a grammatical category and its consequences for translation practice. The study is based on the examination of Raymond Chandler's texts from 1935 to 1950. A list of the specific texts from which the examples are drawn and the options taken by seven Greek translators of those texts appear in the Primary sources.

The PNs under consideration are mostly allusive, i.e. used to convey implicit meaning by referring to popular culture figures (Mae West), transcultural literary ones (Marcel Proust), politicians (President Coolidge), other literary texts (Shakespeare's Richard III), and places (Wilshire Boulevard). The majority of these PNs are used in comparative constructions, metaphors and similes, to imply similarity between their referents and entities referred to in the text ("her desk was like Napoleon's tomb").

The transference of allusive PNs has concerned translation research within the broader context of transferring socioculturally-specific material (e.g.: Nedergaard-Larsen 1993; Leppihalme 1997; Katan 1999). Although humorous examples are involved in this literature, the issue of recreating humorous effect is not addressed. Appropriate strategies for the rendering of PNs have been suggested, some of which are, however, inadequate when it comes to the preservation of humorous intent (e.g. explic(it)ation). The main factor that seems to determine whether the PN should be retained in the target text or an alternative strategy is to be adopted is clearly whether the referent of the PN is assumed to be identifiable by the target audience or not. However, as I will try to show, the treatment of allusive PNs used in jab lines requires particular attention, as
the humorous effect may well be jeopardized if they are replaced any time the criterion of identifiability is not met.

The data presented here were also experimentally tested through two sets of questionnaires, one designed for an initial study and the other for its follow-up. They consist of a number of jab lines from the Greek translations of Chandler’s texts where the source texts (i.e. the primary texts) include PNs. One-hundred and three respondents (well-educated, native speakers of Greek) were first given five paragraph-long extracts from the Greek translations of Chandler’s *Trouble is my Business* (1950) with the relevant jab lines underlined. Respondents were asked to perform the following tasks: (a) identify the referents of the PNs and list assumed relevant features; (b) consider the underlined jab lines and rate them on a three-point scale (“very amusing,” “amusing,” “non-amusing”) unless they could not detect any humorous intent; (c) offer comments explaining their initial reactions. Respondents fell into two groups. Group A consisted of sixteen well-educated Greek males and females aged between 40 and 60. Group B consisted of 87 Greek students of Athens University, aged between 20 and 22 (see note 6). The questionnaires were designed on the basis of Leppihalme’s (1997) test for the identification of allusive material and a simplified version of Ruch’s scale of funniness ratings (see Ruch and Hehl 1998: 116) from a 6- to a 3-point scale. The aim was to assess the effectiveness of the renderings in relation to the translational strategy adopted. Specifically, I wanted to check whether Leppihalme’s (1997: 106) suggested hierarchy of strategies for transferring culturally bound PNs was also applicable to humor translation.

Since no significant correlation between familiarity with the PN and humor appreciation was found, the second questionnaire was devised and distributed to the same respondents. Eleven paragraph-long extracts were now included from various translations of Chandler’s texts into Greek. In this case two to three renderings for each jab line were offered for assessment, each exhibiting a different translational strategy for the same source jab line (i.e. for the same chunk of the primary text). The main objective was a qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis, which might shed some light on the contribution of PNs to humorous effect and eventually facilitate the translator’s decision process for successful transference.

The most intriguing finding of the research reported here is that at least the respondents consulted seem to prefer texts where PNs are preserved while at the same time declaring unfamiliarity with their referents. An
explanation of these data requires recourse to the function of allusive PNs in jab lines, the conceptual structures PNs evoke and the processing load involved. In what follows, corresponding jab lines in source and target texts (i.e. original and translated ones) are first analyzed following the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) to assess their relative similarities. The GTVH (Attardo 1994, 2001) offers a way of accounting for these similarities in terms of identity of one or more Knowledge Resources (KRs). The theory has been applied, in this case, to assess interlingual similarities (see e.g. Attardo 2002; Antonopoulou 2002). In the following section, I present insights from translation research on appropriate strategies for the interlingual transference of culturally bound material (e.g. Leppihalme 1997; Katan 1999; Vandaele 2001, 2002). In the sections called “The first test: Trouble is My Business” and “The second test: Cost/benefit in six translations of the early novels”, the data are discussed in some detail (hence the reader is kindly requested to be patient). Source (original) and target (translated) jab lines are compared using the GTVH metric, and respondents’ reactions to alternative renderings are presented and interpreted as indicating preferred and dispreferred strategies according to the interaction of PN type and context. A discussion of the relevant properties of PNs is then offered in the Discussion section, bringing together research in Cognitive Linguistics (e.g. Langacker 1991; Marmaridou 1992) and Humor Studies (e.g. Attardo 2001, 2002) in an attempt to explain their contribution to humorous effect. The last issue addressed is the practical consequences of this investigation for the translation of jabs including PNs (Concluding remarks section).

Humor theory and humor translation

Chandler’s early texts contain a vast amount of wisecracks, which are significant for characterization (especially the personality of the protagonist, Philip Marlowe), as well as for Chandler’s style and the creation of the particular film noir atmosphere to which he owes much of his transcultural fame. Zabalbeascoa (1994: 95) argues for the importance of recognizing “the precise role of humour in the translation of (any) text” and proposes a hierarchy based on text type (with television comedy at the top and Shakespeare’s tragedies at the bottom). With respect to this continuum, Chandler’s texts could be seen as occupying a top to middle position in terms of humorous potential despite the fact that they are
detective stories rather than comedies. It is, therefore, possible for the translator of these texts to have successful transference of the humor as part of his/her agenda (as is often the case in practice).

All the instances under consideration are good examples of one of the major difficulties involved in humor translation (Vandaele 2001: 37), i.e. the language-culture interaction, since specific, culture-bound, emotive connotations are at play in the cases examined. In transferring the humorous effect of socio-culturally specific material, the translator cannot rely entirely on standard strategies for mediating cultural gaps, such as explic(it)ation, which amounts to adding information (e.g. Katan 1999: 131). For even if the text type and the medium allow for the implementation of this strategy (whether within the text or in footnotes), the risk of jeopardizing the humorous effect through explication is considerable: explanations are infamous joke killers. Cultural transplantation (Hervey and Higgins 2001: 29–31) is an option, although an extreme one. Katan (1999: 132–135) does provide examples from journalistic texts where the names of target culture personalities replace source culture ones, e.g. “Silvio Berlusconi” replaces “Rupert Murdoch” in texts translated from English to Italian. In many literary texts and films, however, a factor of credibility and ambiance is also crucially involved, which renders cultural substitution (as exemplified above) a poor candidate.

The most extensive exploration of the transference of allusive material is offered in Leppihalme (1994, 1997). She argues convincingly that what she finds to be the predominant strategy in her data (English novels translated into Finnish), namely, “minimum change” or preservation of the allusive PN in the target text (TT), does not always lead to a “crossing of the cultural barrier” (1994: 179) basing her argument on the observation that the referents of allusive PNs were mis- or unidentified by her respondents.² She, therefore, presents alternative strategies in the form of a flow chart as a guideline for the translator’s decision process (1997: 106).³ In a nutshell, Leppihalme suggests that if the PN is considered unfamiliar to target readers, the first consideration can be whether some unobtrusive guidance supplied by the translator might be sufficient; if not, a suitable replacement by another PN is the suggested second best choice, where replacing the source text (ST) name by another ST name takes precedence over replacing it by a target text (TT) name. This latter alternative is followed by replacing the PN with a common noun (with similar connotations) before attempting an overt explanation, which is to be adopted in case omission (the last resort) is considered too costly.
What Leppihalme seems to suggest is that preserving the PN constitutes a minimum change but also a minimum effort option for the translator, while total omission lies at the other end of the scale. Evidently, both retention and omission are minimum effort strategies for the translator and it seems that choice between them may well depend on audience design considerations on the translator’s part and/or (related) instructions by the commissioner of the translation.

In the case of Chandler’s Greek translations, it is clearly the type of publication that plays the decisive role in whether the allusive PNs in question are preserved or replaced by adopting an alternative strategy, on the one hand, or omitted without a trace, on the other. Translations appearing in quality editions are on the whole “adequacy” oriented and retain 73 percent of the allusive PNs. Translations of the same STs commissioned by livres-de-poche publishers are “acceptability” oriented following the “belles infidèles” tradition and retain only 5.5 percent of those names.

Translation research has shown the importance of distinguishing between text-bound global strategies, such as relevance to plot and characterization, genre, etc. and all-encompassing preferences of a target audience, such as its attitude toward resistance or non-resistance to other culture influence (Delabastita 1990: 103; Nedergaard-Larsen 1993: 234–235). Such factors are evidently also relevant to the transference of culture-specific PNs determining, to a large extent, the adoption of more adequacy vs. more acceptability oriented strategies. In practice, this means that depending on specific target-culture preferences at the time the translated text is produced (or audience design at large), translators will tend to select more or less toward the minimum change end of a change continuum, preserving the name through direct translation, imitation, etc., or toward the maximum change end, adapting to various degrees.

Most of the allusive PNs in the corpus examined stand for cultural stereotypes, hence their successful transference addresses directly the transference of cultural signs, a focal issue in humor translation research, because “le comique presuppose (peut-être plus que le discours sérieux) des schemas cognitifs communs” (Vandaele 2001: 35). Humor translation is, therefore, particularly sensitive to the fact that the perception of humor depends directly both on its cultural specificity (in the sense of what is humorous inside a certain culture (Diot 1986: 267)) and on the recipient’s understanding of the relevant connotations of a linguistic
expression functioning as a cultural sign (Vandaele ibid.: 37). The PNs in question rely on their culturally specific connotations to function as humor triggers, hence they constitute primary examples of untranslatability, at least prima facie. However, translators commonly employ various strategies to cope with PNs. Attested and suggested transference choices in this area may prove, as I will try to show, instructive for humor translation.

In the following section, I will discuss the results of the initial study (see Introduction), dealing with cases where the translator seems to replace the PN if it is assumed to be unfamiliar to the target audience.

The first test: Trouble Is My Business

Chandler’s story Trouble Is My Business (henceforth TMB 1950) translated into Greek by N. Balis (Ο Κίνδυνος Είναι η Δουλειά μου) has appeared in two editions, a popular publication (1982) and a quality one (1991). No changes were effected in the 1991 edition, which can be an indirect indication of the success of the original translation with target readers. Recreation of humor is clearly part of the translator’s agenda and to that effect most of the appropriate strategies are employed for the transference of the allusive PNs. It is for these reasons that the text was considered highly appropriate for an experimental initial study.

Despite the blatant influence of American culture on postwar Greek society, the sheer lapse of 40 years between ST and TT, plus Chandler’s frequent use of allusive PNs closely bound to highly specific times and places seem to render preservation of the PN an unsatisfactory option in a number of cases. Cultural transplantation/adaptation would create serious problems of credibility/ambiance, if a TT name were to replace an ST one, hence it is notably absent. Examples of attested options are reproduced at this point and respondents’ reactions to the target texts are considered.6

Preservation of the PN

(1) a. The door opened and a tall blond dressed better than the Duchess of Windsor strolled in. (TMB: 2)
b. Ανοίξε η πόρτα και μπήκε μέσα μια ψηλή ξανθή ντυμένη καλύτερα και απ’ τη Δουκίσα Ουίντσορ. (Balis: 2)

[the door opened and a tall blond entered dressed better than the Duchess (of) Windsor]

(2) a. She blushed—and I have a dinner date with Darryl Zanuck. (TMB: 8)

b. Ναι, κοκκίνισε ... κι εμένα με κάλεσε για φαϊ ο Ντάρλ Ζανούκ. (Balis: 9)

[yes, she blushed ... and I have been invited to dinner by Darryl Zanuck]

Both (1a) and (2a) are observations of the explicit narrator (a detective who is a Doppelgänger for Philip Marlowe) made in the course of discussing with his agent (Anna Halsey) the possibility of undertaking a job on her behalf. Anna Halsey is testing the suitability of the detective for the job by bringing her secretary into her office to see the latter’s reactions to his looks and concomitant ability to charm a lady “who has a sense of class.” (1a) is the detective’s reaction upon seeing the secretary; (2a) is his response (self-directed sarcasm) to Anna Halsey’s comment that the secretary blushed upon seeing him. In GTVH terms (Attardo 1994, 2001), (1a) is analyzable as: SO: normal/abnormal; simple/conspicuous lifestyle; clothes of a secretary in a small agency/clothes of ex-king Edward’s wife; LM: analogy; TA: the secretary and the way she dresses; SI: context; NS: comparative construction; LA: title plus proper name. In (2a) the KRs are specifiable as: SO: possible/impossible; simple/conspicuous lifestyle; dining with a friend/dining with the President of Twentieth Century Fox; LM: exaggeration; TA: the detective (and his social status); SI: context; NS: second turn in an adjacency pair; LA: proper name.

The referent of the title in (1a) (the Duchess of Windsor) was identified by all sixteen Greek respondents of Group A (presented with the TT extracts) but proved completely unknown to most of the 87 respondents of Group B. Group B respondents relied on the title to get the joke and assumed that the referent was a very rich and consequently expensively dressed lady, who was renowned at the time and place referred to in the story. The “elegance” element associated with the referent was absent for most, and quite expectedly so, since modern day and especially born aristocrats are not known to be particularly elegant. Notice, however, that at least one level of specification in the SO, namely “simple/conspicuous lifestyle,” was clearly present even for Group B readers who were unable
to identify the intended referent. At first sight, it looks as if the latter group of respondents miss the extent of the incompatibility since the Duchess of Windsor was no ordinary duchess but considered the epitome of elegance at the time. Yet, even for those respondents, the second script is probably constructible along something like: “a certain duchess renowned for the way she dressed.” The quality of being “renowned” is crucial. It may be implicit but it is derivable from the pragmatics of the comparative construction used. This point will be elaborated in the Discussion.

The referent of “Darryl Zanuck” in (2b), was probably the best-known figure in the film industry of the time (from the 1930s to the 1970s), a producer who presided over Twentieth Century Fox from 1935 to 1956. The name was recognized by almost half of Group A respondents (7 out of 16) but none of the Group B ones. Nevertheless, no respondent noted absence of “humorous intent” and even those to whom the referent was unknown reported they had found the lines “amusing.” Co-textual information was reportedly sufficient for readers to guess that Darryl Zanuck was a certain VIP of the time with whom a dinner appointment was quite impossible for an ordinary, low-paid detective.

Replacement of PN by a common noun

(3) a. I need a guy who can act like a bar lizard and can backchat like Fred Allen (TMB: 1).
   b. Χρειάζομαι έναν τύπο που ξέρει να την πέφτει σαν μπαρότιος και ταυτόχρονα να μιλάει σαν πλείμποι των σάλονιων. (Balis: 1)
      [I need a guy who knows how to act like a barfly and at-the-same-time how to talk like a playboy of society]

(4) a. You need the New York Yankees, Robert Donat and the Yacht Club Boys (TMB: 1)
   b. Εσύ θες πυγμάχο, κυριλέ και γκόμενο ταυτόχρονα. (Balis: 1)
      [you want a wrestler, a dandy and a ladies’ man at-the-same-time]

Example (3a) is Anna Halsey’s assessment of the sort of detective she needs for the job and (4a) is the detective’s understanding of the type of assets she requires. Considering (4a) as a whole, the Knowledge Re-
sources are probably specifiable as follows. SO: possible/impossible; ladies’ man or socialite/tough guy; serious or tedious/highly entertaining; ordinary detective/professional entertainer. “Fred Allen” refers to an American humorist who was famous from the 30s to the 50s for his acerbic radio commentary on current issues. The name proved totally unfamiliar to all the members of the target culture consulted (Groups A and B). It is replaced in (3b) by an indefinite description (a high society playboy). This replacement has the effect of retaining some of the relevant elements of the SO in (3a), although on a lower level of specificity: the opposition “ladies’ man or socialite/tough guy” is preserved; the remaining specifications in the SO (provided above) are not necessarily present, however. Similarly in (4b), common nouns replace all three PNs probably considered too culturally specific to license retention. Since humorous effect is present in both (3b) and (4b) according to the respondents, the actual choice of an appropriate common noun by the translator is worth investigating. I will discuss the replacement of “New York Yankees” by an indefinite description (wrestler) in (4b), as an example.

One way of explaining the translator’s choice in (4b), for instance, is the following. The New York Yankees were considered unfamiliar to the target audience and irretrievable from the context. The referents of the PN can be understood as prototypical members of a category roughly describable as consisting of “young, strong, athletic males.” Prototypical members of a similarly describable category in the target culture were, therefore, substituted in the TT, through the common noun πυγμάχος “wrestler”/“boxer.” This is probably as far as cultural adaptation could go without destroying credibility, since wrestlers and boxers could be assumed by target readers to also participate in the source culture. Similar problem solving procedures could be assumed for the rendering of the other PNs in (4a) and (3a). The effect of these substitutions can be explained also as lowering the degree of specificity of the relevant SO: the “tough guy/ladies’ man” opposition is preserved; but characteristics of the specific referents recalled in the ST are evidently absent, along with the uniqueness of the original referents (point to be discussed later).

Replacement of PN by an explicitating phrase

A distinction needs to be made between the previous strategy and a purely explicitating one whereby a phrase is used to make the resolution
of the incongruity (present in the ST) manifest and explicit to the target reader, thus guaranteeing comprehension but sacrificing the humorous effect. The following example is a case in point:

(5) a. The lobby was not quite as big as the Yankee Stadium (TMB: 17)

b. Το χώλ ήταν τεράστιο — κανονικό γήπεδο, δηλαδή (Balis: 24)

[The hall was huge — a regular (football) ground, that-is]

I have commented elsewhere (Antonopoulou 2002) on the semantics of comparative constructions as in (5a), so I will focus here on the actual replacement of the PN. The sentence refers to the size of a conspicuously luxurious and nouveau-riche building, which is compared to the size of the stadium of the New York Yankees. The SO present in the ST line is “simple/conspicuous lifestyle” an extremely common opposition in Chandler’s texts, which is, ipso facto, worth considering to recreate in a TT. The jab in (5b) (or, at least, the attempted jab) might have fared better if the metaphor (“the lobby was a football ground”) had not been preceded by “huge,” leaving, therefore, implicit what is implicit in the source text. By explicitly stating that the size of the lobby was unusually large (as in (5b)) rather than implying this through a (negative) comparison with a (specific) stadium, the opposition is in fact resolved, before it is presented to the reader to work it out on his/her own, thus actively participating in the resolution of the joke. The Greek fixed expression back-translated as “a regular football ground” is offered in (5b) in compensation, but the humorous effect is nevertheless, considerably diminished. Explicitation of the resolution has the well known effect of explaining any mechanism involved in the humorous effect of the text, i.e. it “results in the distraction of the humorous effect” (Attardo 1994: 289).

Throughout the target text, the translator seems to have preserved the PN only in those cases where he/she considered that its referent would be recognized by at least some of the readers and replaced, or simply omitted it everywhere else. This is more or less in accordance with current suggestions in translation research, such as Leppihalme (1997), although the actual translation was produced much earlier.

The second test: Cost/benefit in six translations of the early novels

As already mentioned in the Introduction, a second test was devised, including eleven paragraph-long extracts from the Greek translations of
Chandler’s early novels, accompanied by information on genre and context. More than one Greek renderings of the jab lines containing PNs were available and additional ones were also suggested wherever I considered it necessary. Translators’ names were not included, nor were suggested renderings marked as such (to avoid influencing readers’ responses). Questionnaires were distributed to the same respondents who had performed the tasks for the first test. The jab lines were underlined (as before). Identification of PN referents was again requested along with mention of relevant features considered to contribute to an understanding of a jab line as amusing. Ratings on a 1–3-point scale for each jab line were sought. Respondents were also asked to provide comments relevant to their assessment and mark any lines in which they did not detect any humorous intention. The results are illuminating as to the appropriateness of different strategies used for the particular readership.

In the following example (6) from *The Lady in the Lake* (LL), the explicit narrator describes an old sheriff in a small town focusing on his “fringed brown scarf” and his

(6) leather jerkin which must have been new once, say about the time of Grover Cleveland’s first term (LL: 55)

a. Retention of PN

\[ \alpha \zeta \pi \omega \mu e \varepsilon \pi \omega \chi \zeta \varepsilon \Gamma \kappa r \omega \beta e r \ K l \h b \varepsilon \lambda a n t \ t \zeta \pi \rho \omega \tau h s \ p e r i \delta o u \] (Argyros: 81)

[. . . let us say at the time of Grover Cleveland of the first (historical) period]

b. Omission of the line containing the PN (Mastoraki)

c. Replacement by a different source culture PN (with transcultural grounding)

\[ \alpha \zeta \pi \omega \mu e \varepsilon \pi \tau h \alpha \mu \Lambda \iota \nu k o \lambda \nu \] (suggested alternative)

[. . . let us say at the time of Abraham Lincoln]

No respondent reported familiarity with the PN in (6a) (in sharp contrast to (6c)) but about 80 percent of the respondents guessed it referred to some US president. 68 percent rated (6a) as “amusing” and 20 percent as “very amusing.” Interestingly, (6a) was considered preferable to (6c), which was rated by 49 percent of the respondents as “amusing” and by 18 percent of them as “very amusing.” In the respondents’ comments, particular mention was made of the “specificity” provided through \[ \tau h \zeta \pi \rho \omega \tau h s \ p e r i \delta o u \] “of the first term/time” as enhancing the humorous effect.
Example (7) is an equally unattractive description of an old alcoholic woman in *Farewell, My Lovely* (FML)

(7) . . . who hadn’t washed her hair since Coolidge’s second term (FML: 36)

a. Retention of PN (plus explicitation)

\[ \text{από τότε που ο Κουλιτς} \text{ εκλέχτηκε ξανά Πρόεδρος (Αποστολίδης: 47)} \]

[. . . since Coolidge was re-elected President]

b. Replacement of PN by transculturally grounded description

\[ \text{από τον Πρώτο Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο και μετά (Παπαδημητρίου: 25)} \]

[. . . since the First World War and afterward]

The renderings of (7) present a rather special case. The expression \( \text{σπό τον Πρώτο Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο} \) “since the First World War” is idiomatically used in Greek to signify that a certain event occurred a very long time before the time of the (event of the) utterance. There is evidence to the effect that fixed expressions work well with Greek audiences as a humorous device (Antonopoulou 2002). It is probably for this reason that the respondents found (7b) amusing (“very amusing” 15 percent, “amusing” 85 percent, “non-amusing” 0 percent). The same respondents who had commented on the specificity of (6a) made similar comments for (7a), which was rated as “very amusing” 18 percent, “amusing” 67 percent, “non-amusing” 15 percent.

In (6) and (7), Chandler makes use of PNs as a particular humorous device that can be roughly described as providing more information than necessary for the immediate purposes of discourse.11 Chandler makes extensive use of this device through different linguistic means. In GTVH terms, it seems reasonable to accommodate it under different KR3s. Thus, SO could be specified as relevant/irrelevant or specifiable/non-specifiable; LM: overspecification, exaggeration; NS: (overspecified) statement; LA: register(?)12

The following case contains a clear intertextual reference and has received different renderings by the two Greek translators of FML:

(8) You look like Hamlet’s father (FML: 160)

a. Retention of PN

\[ \text{Με τον πατέρα του Άμλετ μουάζεις (Αποστολίδης: 199)} \]

[With the father of Hamlet you-look]
Example (8) is a remark made by Anne Riordan in FML upon opening the door and looking at Philip Marlowe, who is apparently extremely pale after having been kept hostage and drugged. Both translators retain the PN, but in (8b) an explicitation is also added to the effect that Marlowe’s appearance is reminiscent of that of a ghost. The assumption made by the translator is probably that the target audience would not know that Hamlet’s father is a ghost from the beginning of the play. The respondents preferred (8a) to (8b), since the corresponding ratings are: “very amusing” 18 percent, “amusing” 60 percent, “non-amusing” 12 percent for (8a) and “very amusing” 2 percent, “amusing” 36 percent, “non-amusing” 62 percent for (8b). Explicitation in (8b) is not complete, in the sense that “paleness,” the overlapping part of the opposed scripts, remains implicit. Still, (incomplete) explicitation here has two undesirable effects; not only does it allow an implicit element to surface—Hamlet’s father is a ghost—but it also makes the resulting NP verbose and stylistically awkward with two genitives in succession. Neither feature seems to contribute to humorous effect.14

The following extract from *The Big Sleep* (1970) (TBS) belongs to a description of the “Cypress Club,” a gambling house established in a large mansion with “enormous scrolled porches,” turrets and stained-glass trims and a “general air of nostalgic decay.” By asserting that the present owner of the mansion (Eddie Mars) had left the outside as he had found it, the narrator is paying him a compliment:

(9) Eddie Mars had left the outside much as he had found it instead of making it over to look like an MGM set (TBS: 128)

Replacement of PN with an explicitating phrase

a. Ο Εντι Μαρς είχε αφήσει την πρόσοψη όπως την είχε βρει αντί να τη μετατρέψει σε κινηματογραφικό σκηνικό (Athanasopoulou: 120)

[ Eddie Mars had left the exterior as he-had found it instead of turning it into a movie set]

b. Ο Εντι Μαρς είχε αφήσει το εξωτερικό μέρος σχεδόν ανέπαφο αντί να το μετατρέψει σ’ ένα Χολυγουντιανό κατασκεύασμα (Kargakou: 131)
Eddie Mars had left the exterior part almost untouched instead of turning it into a Hollywood artifact.

Replacement of abbreviated PN with its explicit form

\[
\text{αντί να το μετατρέψει σε σκηνικό της Μέτρο Γκόλντγουϊν Μάγερ (suggested alternative)}
\]

[... instead of turning it into a set of Metro Goldwyn Meyer]

It is interesting to notice here that both translators replace the PN with a qualifying adjective, with “movie” in (9a) being less specific than “Hollywood” in (9b), which is in turn less specific than “MGM” in the ST (9) and in the suggested alternative (9c). In the last case, the name of the company is spelled out so that it is immediately accessible to target audiences since MGM is widely known to Greeks but standardly referred to through an explicit expression rather than the abbreviation in (9). In all four alternatives, the basic elements of the corresponding KRs are the same, which explains the intuition that it is in fact the same joke reproduced in the translated versions. The higher level specifications in SO are: normal/abnormal; genuine and stylish/artificial and nouveau-riche. The artificiality targeted in (9) is present in all these versions and is in fact enhanced by the derogatory term κατασκευάζωμε “artefact” in (9b), which also preserves the grandiosity and fake pompousness (implied in (9)) through “Hollywood.” Nevertheless, (9c) came out as preferable even by respondents who were unfamiliar with the actual referent but could guess it was an American film company. The actual ratings provided for (9a) are: “very amusing” 0 percent, “amusing” 12 percent, “non-amusing” 88 percent. Those for (9b) are: “very amusing” 2 percent, “amusing” 31 percent and “non-amusing” 67 percent and for (9c) they are: “very amusing” 16 percent, “amusing” 68 percent and “non-amusing” 16 percent.

The next example is from General Sternwood’s description of Rusty Regan in TBS:

(10) . . . a big curly-headed Irishman from Conwell, with sad eyes and a smile as wide as Wilshire Boulevard (TBS: 16)

Retention of PN

a. . . . κι ένα χαμόγελο πιο πλατύ από τη λεωφόρο Γουάιλσάιρ (Athanasopoulou: 14)

[... and a smile wider than the Avenue Wilshire]

b. . . . και πλατύ χαμόγελο σαν τη λεωφόρο Ουάιλσάιρ (Kargakou: 14)

[... and a wide smile like the Avenue Wilshire]
Omission of PN

c. . . καὶ χαμόγελο πλατύ σα λεωφόρο (suggested alternative)
[. . . and a smile wide like (an) avenue]

Both translators kept the PN (omitted in the suggested alternative (10c), which proved the dispreferred alternative here), although no respondent reported familiarity with the referent of the PN. Specifically, the ratings for the renderings of (10) are as follows: “very amusing” 10 percent, “amusing” 77 percent, and “non-amusing” 13 percent for (10a); “very amusing” 22 percent, “amusing” 68 percent, and “non-amusing” 10 percent for (10b); and for (10c): “very amusing” 14 percent, “amusing” 56 percent, and “non-amusing” 30 percent. The way I interpret these ratings is that giving a name to the avenue works better than referring to it as “an avenue.” Notice that, whether the name of the boulevard is mentioned or not, all KRs in the various versions of (10) receive essentially the same specifications. The metaphorical mapping between a wide smile and a wide boulevard is straightforward and, therefore, very easy to process and Wilshire Boulevard is understood here as appropriate for that purpose because of its assumed size. It is, therefore, interesting to see what the presence of the actual PN contributes to the jabs containing it, given that the referent is unknown to the target audience. By naming something one implies that it is worth naming, significant enough to be named. In the cases of (10a) and (10b), the implication retrieved by the reader is probably that Wilshire Boulevard is so wide that its mention in this context is justified. Suppression of the name (as unknown) amounts to providing a superordinate category instead of a subordinate one, i.e. by definition something with fewer characteristics. Preserving only the essential (in this case) characteristic (namely “width”) is apparently less effective. This is a plausible explanation for the fact that (10b) fares slightly better than (10a) and that (10c) is the alternative least preferred by the specific respondents consulted. This point will be also addressed in the following section.

The jab in (11) looks, at first sight, like a case of overspecification, since a lengthy and elaborate linguistic expression is offered to describe how Marlowe felt upon finding himself suddenly in an unpleasant situation:

(11) I felt as cold as Finnegan’s feet the day they buried him (FML: 119)

Omission of PN containing phrase
a. Είχα παγώσει ολόκληρος (Apostolides: 149)
   [I-was frozen all-over]

b. Ένοιωσα σα να μου ρίχνουν παγωμένο νερό στη ράχη
   (Papadimitriou: 81)
   [I-felt like frozen water was thrown on my back]

Retention of PN

c. Είμουνα παγωμένος σαν τα πόδια του Φίννεγκαν τη μέρα της κηδείας του (suggested alternative)
   [I-was frozen like the feet of Finnegan (on) the day of his funeral]

The *femme fatale* of the novel is in Marlowe’s arms, kissing him passionately when her husband suddenly walks in, surprising Marlowe unpleasantly. The intertextuality possibly involved in the PN would be lost on many target-text readers. It is, therefore, possible that for this reason both translators decided to omit the PN, sacrificing completely the jab of the ST, although (11a) is drawn from the quality edition where omission of PNs is comparatively rare. In fact, for most of the respondents the PN was unfamiliar. Yet a number of them found (11c) amusing (2 percent rated it as “very amusing” and 47 percent as “amusing”). Evidently, knowledge of the referent is irrelevant for arriving at the crucial SO here. For instance, ‘alive/dead; tough guy/helpless corpse; specifiable/unspecifiable; trivial/important’ are oppositions involved in the relevant scripts in (11) and (11c), which do not require recourse to the actual referent of the PN. Therefore, omission of the phrase containing it is not licensed by the (correctly) assumed unfamiliarity of the reader with a source-culture specific PN.

In the immediate context of the following jab, Marlowe is drinking and flirting with a girl, who asks him if he does “much of this sort of thing.” His reply is:

(12) I’m a Tibetan monk in my spare time (FML: 115)
Retention of PN containing phrase

a. . . . στον ελεύθερο χρόνο μου παριστάνω το Θιβετιανό μοναχό (Apostolides: 144)
   [. . . in my spare/free time I-play the Tibetan monk]

Replacement of PN containing phrase

b. Είμαι πραγματικός ασκητής στον ελεύθερο χρόνο μου (Papadimitriou: 78)
   [I-am a real ascetic in my spare/free time]
The humor here depends on the clash between contextual information on Philip Marlowe’s lifestyle (including heavy drinking and heavy fighting, for instance) and his self-assessment as a Buddhist holy man. This is enhanced by the addition of “in my spare time,” which might be considered a separate jab characterized by the opposition: permanent/occasional lifestyle. Therefore, the humor was preserved even in (12b) where the more generic “ascetic” replaces the specific “Tibetan.” Yet, (12a) was the strongly preferred option by respondents, as their ratings indicate: “very amusing” 12 percent, “amusing” 74 percent, and “non-amusing” 14 percent for (12a) and “very amusing” 7 percent, “amusing” 35 percent, and “non-amusing” 58 percent for (12b).

In principle, the difference between the jabs containing the PN and the one omitting it is again one of degree of specificity. In this context, “ascetic” is the obvious superordinate term for the subordinate (specific) “Tibetan monk,” which functions as the most prototypical member of the category of “people leading an ascetic life.” One way of interpreting respondents’ preferences is that the higher the degree of specificity, or, alternatively, the lower the level of abstraction, the more preferable the jab seems to be. This points to the direction of the kind of contribution PNs seem to make to humorous effect.

Compare two more cases, where the PNs were, expectedly, totally unfamiliar to the Greek respondents consulted. (13) constitutes Marlowe’s response to a visitor’s comment that his curtains need cleaning.

(13) I’ll send them out come St. Swithin’s Day (FML: 79)
Replacement of PN by functionally equivalent phrase
a. Θα τις στείλω εγώ πριν τις γιορτές (Apostolides: 100)
[I-will send them myself before the holidays]
Replacement of PN by a target culture PN
b. Θα τις στείλω των Αγίων Πάντων (Papadimitriou: 53)
[I-will send them (on) All Saints’ (day)]
Replacement of PN by a fictional source or target culture PN
c. Θα τις στείλω της Αγίας Καικυλίας/τον Αγίου Ποτέ/τον Αγίου Ανήμερα (suggested alternatives)
[I-will send them on St. Cecilia’s /on St. Never’s /on St. Sameday’s]

Members of the source culture consulted could not identify St. Swithin’s Day, although the following information might be accessible to some ST readers. The relics of St. Swithin were supposed to be taken to a
shrine on July 15, 971 when unusually heavy rain made the project impossible not only for that particular day but also for the following 40 days. Because of this, (source culture) tradition has it that if it rains on July 15, it will keep raining for the next 40 days. It is doubtful that such information is of any significance to the source culture audience, but the name of St. Swithin as such can be assumed to be recognizable. To target culture readers, not only is the referent unknown, but also the name itself sounds extremely outlandish. That is probably the reason why neither translator chose to retain it. Contextual information is sufficient to elicit the joke, namely, that the curtains are never going to be sent to the cleaners. This could be made explicit by using the expression τον Αγίου Ποτέ on “St. Never’s” (day) a popular fixed expression in the target language, preferred by some respondents.17

The other suggested alternative, i.e. της Αγίας Κυκλίδας on “St. Cecilia’s” was strongly preferred though by group A respondents, possibly because foreign names “translated” into Greek by adapting them to the Greek morphological system sound funny to sections of the target audience.18 Register clash is the obvious trigger of humor in this case. In that sense a different joke is created in the TT, a possibility worth exploiting but rarely taken up in the texts under investigation, perhaps because of the well-known prejudice in translation practice expressed by von Stackelberg (1988: 11) as follows: “Should the translator make us laugh at his own ideas rather than at those of the author? We do not think so” (quoted in Vandaele 2001: 34). In GTVH terms, the SO in (13) could be specified as: “actual/non-actual; specific/non-specific” and perhaps constitute a case of overspecification. In the suggested options within (13c) the SO is probably: “possible/impossible” and the humorous effect relies on the actual expression used; the joke is internal to the PNs “Saint Never” and “Saint Sameday,” respectively.19 Evidently, the last two options in (13c) are instances of cultural transplantation.

An interesting case (and a highly successful one with respondents) is the following:

(14) Put it in the baby’s bank, I said. Or whistle Roses of Picardy
(FML: 209)

Omission of PN containing phrase
a. Βάλτο στον κουμπαρά σου είπα (Apostolides: 260)
[Put-it in your piggy-bank I-said]

Retention of PN and compensation
b. Βάλτο στο φιλόπωχο τραπεζί, είπε, ή σφύριξε τα τριαντάφυλλα της Πικαρδίας (Papadimitriou: 142)

[Put-it in-the collection-for-the-poor box I-said or whistle the roses of Picardy]

This is Marlowe’s response to a street vendor who has thrown Marlowe’s money to his face and then asks a rhetorical question as to how he should dispose of it. The vendor had been whistling “Roses of Picardy” before this unpleasant encounter with Marlowe. “Roses of Picardy” was a romantic, popular tune of the time (early 40s) and completely unknown to the target culture respondents. The second clause (“Or whistle ‘Roses of Picardy’”) did not make any sense to target audiences and was rejected as “nonsensical.” The implications (and the joke) are, however, easily retrievable from the context, and respondents’ ratings show strong preference for the first clause of (14b). (14a) was rated as “very amusing” 12 percent, “amusing” 40 percent, and “non-amusing” 48 percent; the scores for (14b) were: “very amusing” 46 percent, “amusing” 35 percent, and “non-amusing” 19 percent. As evidenced in the respondents’ comments, this preference depended on their appreciation of the translator’s choice of the expression φιλόπωχο τραπεζί “collection for the poor in church” replacing the ST “baby’s bank.” Compensation is, therefore, offered here and the ST joke is replaced by something “very amusing” for the target audience, since a humorous device is exploited, which is particularly appreciated by Greek audiences, namely register clash (Canakis 1994; Sidiropoulou 2002; Antonopoulou 2002). In this particular case, an old-fashioned expression from a religious (actually church-going) register is brought into the middle of the film noir atmosphere of the story. Under these circumstances, whether the PN is retained or not seems hardly important for the humorous effect of these lines, taken as a whole. Notice, however, in this connection, that it is the actual register used and not simply its referential framework, (i.e. church going and giving for the poor) which enhances the incongruity of the relevant scripts. Therefore, the success of this line rests on the adaptation not of a cultural element, but rather of a technique (register humor) that figures prominently in the target culture repertoire. The target audience is familiar with “baby banks” or “piggy banks,” but they also assume that “collection for the poor” is quite germane to the ST-cultural environment as well. No need for cultural adaptation is, therefore, present and no credibility/ambiance problem is created in (14b). Register humor compensates for the loss
effected in the second clause. Therefore, the line is saved not because of the retention of the PN here (which is considered an unsuccessful choice by respondents) but due to an effective acceptability oriented rendering of the preceding NP (see note 5).

A further instance of successful compensation is also provided by the following example:

(15) She put her left hand out to me with a pathetic gesture, like the erring wife in East Lynne. (LL: 81)

Omission of PN containing phrase
a. Ἀπλώσε το αριστερό της χέρι σε μια κίνηση απελπισίας. (Mistraki: 77)
   [She-put-out her left hand in a gesture of hopelessness]

Retention of PN and compensation
b. Μου ἀπλώσε το αριστερό της χέρι, ικετευτικά, σαν την αμαρτωλή σύζυγο στο East Lynne. (Argyros: 118)
   [She-put-out her left hand to-me, begging, like the sinful wife in East Lynne]

The original audience of the ST might well have read *East Lynne*, a highly successful detective story written in 1861 (by Mrs. Henry Wood). The character referred to as “the erring wife” in (15) is in fact presented as a thorough villain in *East Lynne*, so referring to her in this manner in LL is probably a gross understatement contributing to the humorous effect of the line. For Greek respondents the PN proved completely unknown. The translator of (15a) has omitted the simile altogether and, therefore, no humor is created at that particular point in the TT (besides the contextually implied irony). In (15b), however, retention of the unfamiliar PN is accompanied by the highly successful (according to the respondents’ comments) choice of “sinful” with a strong religious connotation. Register humor is created with “sinful” activating a “religion” scene clashing with the contextually established (and already activated) one and the general context of the story. Ratings for (15b) are: “very amusing” 38 percent, “amusing” 42 percent, “non-amusing” 20 percent. (15a) was almost unanimously marked as having no humorous intent.

The following, final, example involves a highly culture-bound PN. In (16) “Philo Vance” is the detective in S. S. Van Dine’s detective novels, sharing with his creator a taste for the arts and speaking in Van Dine’s old fashioned, immaculate English prose:
Respondents guessed (wrongly) that Philo Vance was an American actor of the time, assuming an old-fashioned, posh British accent and reported enjoying (16a), unlike (16b) where the whole simile is omitted along with the PN. The ratings provided were: “very amusing” 11 percent, “amusing” 63 percent, and “non-amusing” 26 percent for (16a) and “very amusing” 2 percent, “amusing” 38 percent, and “non-amusing” 60 percent for (16b). So, although contextual information is misleading here (an accent is associated with speech rather than written discourse), the scene activated retains sufficient similarity with the one containing the intended referent, to secure humorous effect. The presence of a PN, although unknown, seems to activate a concrete scene involving in this case the wrong referent, but a specific scene, nonetheless (for each reader). The effect of the concrete scenes activated by PNs, i.e. image-like scripts, seems to have particular importance for humor. It is to the discussion of this issue that the following section is devoted.

To sum up the data: PNs used in jabs in the texts examined may appear as head nouns, or as modifiers of various kinds. Consequently, they have different functions. What they share is that they are used because of the scenes associated with their referents, which are, to a large extent, culturally grounded. Most of the referents of these PNs are understood as occupying the central positions of various culturally definable categories, e.g. the “Duchess of Windsor” is used as the prototypical member of the category of “elegant ladies of society,” “Tibetan monk” is understood as the prototypical member of the category of “people leading an ascetic life,” etc. Other referents, e.g. President Coolidge, are only relevant because of the distance in time between the event described in the text and the period in which they played a role in American politics. In the former case, PN frames are used by the author to draw comparisons between characters in the story and the referents of those PNs, while in the latter case, using a PN simply overspecifies the (assumed) actual distance in
time between events. Interestingly, there are cases where the PN may function as a stereotype for those readers who cannot identify the referent and as a case of overspecification for those who can, e.g. “I was as cold as Finnegan’s feet the day they buried him” (ex. 11).

Discussion

I have been investigating the correlation between the type of nominal used in jab lines and the resulting humorous effect. In particular, my hypothesis is that the humorous effect may rely crucially on the degree of immediacy with which the reader can establish mental contact with the referent and that this may depend on the type of nominal used.

According to Cognitive Grammar (CG), the functions of nominals are to be understood as follows. Type-specification accounts for the semantic content of a simple noun (e.g. road): “it specifies the basis for identifying various entities as being representatives of the same class but is not tied to any particular instance of that class” (Langacker 1991: 53). On the other hand, a full nominal (e.g. these roads), presupposes instantiation of the type in question and “designates one or more instances” (ibid.). A nominal provides also some indication of quantity (either in absolute terms (e.g. two roads) or proportionally (e.g. most roads)), as well as an indication of grounding, i.e. of how the designated instances are related to the speech event and its participants (i.e. the ground). “Grounding pertains primarily to whether within some frame of reference, an instance of a type (or a set of instances) is uniquely apparent to both the speaker and the hearer” (ibid.). In other words in CG all nominals are described as “designating an instance of the corresponding type and further as incorporating some specification of quantity and grounding” (Langacker 1991: 54). Notice further that since CG is concerned with how “conceived situations are linguistically portrayed” (ibid.: 95) rather than with notions such as truth and falsity or reality, both type-specifications and instances are understood as conceptual entities.20

The consequences for proper names of this understanding of the function of nominals can be summed up as follows: In contrast to the logical—semantic tradition where PNs have no semantic content and can, therefore, function only referentially, in Cognitive Grammar PNs incorporate a type-specification. A PN such as “Darryl Zanuck” has an inherent specification of type (person), quantity (singular) and ground-
ing (definiteness — i.e. “the designated individual is uniquely apparent to both speaker and hearer on the basis of this name alone” (Lan-gacker 1991: 59)). Therefore, type-specification, instantiation, quantity and grounding are conflated in a single expression and are in fact associated with the PN as a whole.

For our purposes, this implies that the hearer is enabled to establish mental contact with the referent at minimum cognitive cost. It is as if the PN functions as a shortcut for the recipient to retrieve masses of socio-cultural information. Scenes/scripts are activated all at once, especially if the PN has strong cultural currency. In such cases it is culturally grounded in a unique way, since it can evoke a shared concrete image. Consider as a case in point from TMB a description of a huge jar, probably of “Arabesque” style decorating a conspicuously nouveau-rich apartment building. Reference to the jar in the same manner is repeated in the text:

(17) [he] looked past my shoulder at an Ali Baba oil jar big enough to keep a tiger in (TMB: 17)

(18) [he] leaned absently on the end of the desk and stared at the Ali Baba oil jar, as if trying to make up his mind whether it was a spittoon (TMB: 17)

(19) [he] was leaning on the end of the desk again staring at the Ali Baba oil jar (TMB: 24)

The SO here is specifiable as simple/conspicuous lifestyle, which would probably survive even if the PN (Ali Baba) were omitted. Yet, characterizing the oil jar as an “Ali Baba” one makes the image concrete, culturally grounded and shared (cultural information on Ali Baba probably being very widespread). It also relates the description to contextual elements depicting the building as of “Moorish style” surrounded by “huge date palms” and can evoke immediately the whole scene from Ali Baba’s tale (or the movie on it) where the jars are so large that men do actually hide in them. But even if the reader is unfamiliar with the referent, the name itself is sufficient to activate “Arabic” or “Islamic art” scripts at least.

The important point here is that users of a language know a lot about PNs, regardless of whether they can identify the referent or not. As Mar-maridou (1992: 120–121) observes, PNs activate experiential scenes relating to the category itself in terms of socio-cultural practice and linguistic information. Users of the English language know that “Mary,” for instance, is conventionally associated with female human entities or that
“Tom” and “Dick” are associated with working class males in Britain (unlike “Richard” and “Edward”), that “Finnegan” is probably Irish, etc. In other words, type specification, instantiation and grounding depend on socio-cultural and linguistic convention.

In paradigms other than CG (for example those following the logical—semantic tradition), PNs lack sense. In practical terms, this may be interpreted as follows: they are useless unless one already knows the referent (or becomes aware of the referent through ostention, for instance). I suggest that this traditional understanding of PNs is of limited applicability to actual communication chains, such as the one between a source text author, a target text author (translator), and a target text reader. Provided the ST and TT cultural environments are not incomensurate, TT readers can go a long way towards constructing the referent from the linguistic input (i.e. the PN, which in Cognitive Grammar also encompasses world knowledge). What seems particularly important for humor translation purposes is the following additional observation. If an entity is referred to by name, then the producer of the message is assumed to have reason to believe (a) that the entity in question is worth naming and mentioning by name and/or (b) that the recipient of the message is in a position to identify the referent.

The implications of these points for the humorous import of allusive PNs are twofold: the first implication relates to how the recipient arrives at a construction of at least some relevant scripts to appreciate a jab. The second one relates to the notion of shared versus different cognitive environment (Gutt 2000: 124), which is also relevant for humor appreciation (Vandaele 2001: passim).

To illustrate the first implication, I will use example (10) of the preceding section: “[...] and a smile as wide as Wilshire Boulevard.” The difference between “Wilshire Boulevard” and the corresponding indefinite description, i.e. “a boulevard,” is evidently one of degree of specificity, much like any case of hyponymy, e.g. “furniture > sofa > Bauhaus sofa.” Such taxonomies of the familiar structuralist traditions are understood as type hierarchies in CG. Moreover, CG suggests that we can look at the lowest level in a type hierarchy as consisting of “specific instances distinguished by their position in the domain of instantiation” (Langacker 1991: 61) and, therefore, treat the relationship between, say, “human” and “Darryl Zanuck” as parallel to the one between, say, “animate” and “human” (or furniture > sofa > Bauhaus sofa, as above). In other words, instances are to be incorporated as the lowest level in type
hierarchies and the hyponymic relation between two type-specifications is not to be kept distinct in kind from the relation between type-
specification and instantiation (ibid.: 63)).

If a PN is in essence the lowest level in a type hierarchy, i.e. nothing more or less than a (highly specific) hyponym, we have a principled explanation for the following (attested) situation. Faced with PNs the referents of which are considered unknown to target audiences, translators often adopt the strategy suggested as appropriate in case the target language lacks a term “equivalent” to the one provided in the source text: they use a superordinate term that will contain, by definition, at least some of the semantic properties of the “missing” subordinate/specific one. Notice, however, that for the purposes of humorously exploited allusive PNs, this strategy may not be the most appropriate one. For, besides the difference in specificity, the conversational implications accompanying the use of a PN go further. Even if the recipient cannot identify the actual referent, s/he is still in a position to realize that the producer has probably chosen to refer to that particular entity by name for a reason. In the specific context of example (10), for instance, (“[...] a smile as wide as Wilshire Boulevard”) that reason can be readily identified as revolving around the capacity of Wilshire Boulevard to function as a prototypical member of the category of “impressively wide, luxurious, well known boulevards.” It is on the basis of this understanding that the recipient can now reconstruct the relevant scripts and arrive at a concrete image of a boulevard, which they may not have experienced, but can well imagine as possessing all the required properties. The readers of the target text, in this case, will draw from their own experience of what the overall higher order category is and what its prototypical members should be like, incorporating also private associations. They may, in fact, activate a scene of a boulevard, which can even surpass the intended referent in “splendour.” Scripts include “the sum total of the cultural knowledge of a society” (Attardo 1997: 402), but the societies in question (American and Greek) are not so incommensurate as to completely disallow reconstruction of parts of such knowledge. The second implication of Langacker’s analysis relates to the notion of shared cognitive environment and can be illustrated by reference to example (9): “[...] instead of making it over to look like an MGM set.” In terms of hyponymy, which is the appropriate lexical relationship between PNs and (generic) common nouns, as I have suggested, one can establish a hierarchical order of “film industry productions” categories
as follows: “American productions > Hollywood productions > MGM productions.” The lower the level of abstraction (or the higher the level of concreteness) the smaller the set referred to by that name, or the fewer the members of that category. In other words, the more specific the name (e.g. MGM vs. Hollywood) the smaller the group of people expected to have the relevant information at their disposal. Evidently, it is for this reason that the translators of (10) omit the highly specific “MGM” in favor of the less specific “Hollywood” in (10b) and even the more inclusive term “movie” in (10a). Recognition of the most specific term (as in (10c)) is, strictly speaking, restricted to a subset of the target readership, as compared to the set of readers who can identify the referent of “Hollywood.” Notice, however, that *mutatis mutandis*, by being presented with a *specific* term, like “Metro Goldwyn Meyer,” the reader is assumed to be a member of the “informed” subset. The message encoded through a PN associated with specific, restricted, culturally-bound connotations is presented as shared knowledge. The recipient is invited to recognize the cultural relevance of the referent for the task at hand thus (re)establishing membership in the pertinent set of people who can share the joke as they also share the necessary cultural information to construct the scripts. A consideration of the respondents’ comments suggests that even slight contextual clues will interact with existing socio-linguistic knowledge to arrive at the construction of the relevant scenes.

It has often been pointed out that “a great deal of humor involves problem solving” (Vandaele 1999: 241), that it demands effort, the pay off of which is an increased self-esteem, joy, and aesthetic pleasure (Kotthoff 1999: 127, 128). The same applies to recognizing an allusion, which also involves relative effort and has been related to “the intellectual joy of the receiver” (Leppihalme 1997: 7). Besides, like humor, allusions also require (or assume, I would add) a shared cognitive environment. In that sense, allusive PNs used for humorous purposes function as elements in cultural jokes and play a role in group-alignment and cultural identity (Vandaele 2001: 36). The practical implications of these observations for humor translation and the transference of PNs are presented in the final section of this paper as concluding remarks.

**Concluding remarks**

The translator of a humorous text (like the translator of a serious one) is implicitly engaged in a multi-factor cost/benefit analysis, which should
yield the optimal strategy for the appreciation of a text’s humor (unlike the translator of a serious text) by the target readership. In the process s/he has to take into account the differences between the expectations and the cognitive environments not only of ST and TT readers, but also of subsets within them (like the translator of a serious text). The readership of detective stories, such as the texts examined here, includes both sophisticated, well-educated readers and unsophisticated, less well-educated ones. Such readers are expected to have distinctly different cultural backgrounds but a shared involvement in a problem-solving process. In other words, although they may vary widely in terms of cultural information available to them, readers of detective stories participate cognitively in the problem-solving activity of the detective and are, therefore, prepared or implicitly committed to engage in some cognitive effort. Leppihalme (1997: 58) attributes to Susan Bassnett the observation that crime fiction may well make more use of allusions than some other types of text because the reader is actively searching for clues. For the purposes of humor translation, these observations suggest that the target audience is prepared to make some guess work and that this may well be expected to be put to use if they recognize humorous intent with the additional benefits humor recognition involves. The problem for the translator is how much cognitive effort is envisaged in each case.

The significance of “moderate challenge” for humor appreciation is often discussed in the humor literature (see, for instance, McGhee 1979: 157, 161; Attardo et al. 1994: 39) as is also the fact that individuals have their own optimal level of challenge (McGhee 1979: 156). What is also emphasised in the translation studies literature is the significance of norm-related factors, such as special target language and target group considerations along with the open vs. closed nature of the target language and culture (Delabastita 1989, 1990; Nedegaard-Larsen 1993). Consequently, what is actually needed is research into how moderate challenge and cultural specificity considerations can be combined in a non-ad hoc manner for the successful transference of humorous, culturally bound discourse. The present paper is an attempt in this direction.

To that end, I have examined culturally-bound PNs appearing mostly in metaphorical mappings between characters in fiction and personalities known to the ST audience, at the time the source texts were written, but unknown, for the most part, to the TT readers consulted.

This situation could give rise to what Leppihalme (1997: 197) calls “culture bumps,” i.e. material that is puzzling or impenetrable for the
target text reader. Leppihalme suggests that the translator should aim at eliminating culture bumps through the adoption of an appropriate strategy (such as replacing an allusive PN unfamiliar to the target readership). The rationale for this suggestion is that TT readers are entitled to “the materials needed for participation in a communicative process” (ibid.). The hypothesis I am investigating here is that if humorous effect is part of the translator’s agenda the materials needed for the participation of the readers may be different from those necessary for participation in a process where the transmission of factual information is the focus of the communicative event. If this proves to be the case, somewhat different strategies will have to be adopted for the transference of culturally-bound linguistic expressions (such as the PNs discussed here).

In analyzing the data I have drawn, first, on Humor Theory and in particular I have used the Knowledge Resources of the GTVH as a metric for comparing ST and TT jab lines. Secondly, I have used the insights of Cognitive Linguistics (especially Langacker 1991; Marmaridou 1992) for a better understanding of the function of PNs. Finally I have sought respondents’ reactions (and comments) for a (limited) assessment of relative humor appreciation, in order to establish an initial experimental basis. The tests, as already pointed out, have been designed in the interest of a qualitative rather than a quantitative study with the specific objective to explore whether assumed familiarity of the target audience with a humorously exploited PN is a necessary factor for the appreciation of the jab line containing it. The analysis of the data has yielded the results summed up in what follows.

One of the strategies translators standardly employ if a PN is considered of limited currency for the target readership is to replace it with a common noun or a more “general” term (in the case of modifying adjectives). I have tried to show that this is in accordance with standard translation theory suggestions to the effect that the superordinate term be used in replacement of a subordinate one for which the target language lacks an “equivalent” (e.g. (4a) (9a, b) (12b) in The first test: “Trouble Is My Business” section). Evidently, the alienating effect on the reader through exposure to “incomprehensible” linguistic frames would be as detrimental for humor appreciation as it would be for any communicative task. Yet, respondents’ reactions show that the risk of alienation is perhaps over-estimated. Preserving a PN with limited grounding (in the cognitive environment of specific target audiences) need not be avoided at all costs if that PN is used for allusive and humorous purposes.
Readers use their imaginations, draw from their own cultural experiences, and select clues from the context. If the source and target linguocultural environments are not incommensurate, readers will find a way to be amused, provided they so much as guess humorous intent. To that effect, they will activate scripts bearing sufficient similarity to the ones evoked by the source text linguistic frames, even if they include nonfamiliar material, such as PNs unknown to them. The requirement that humor should not involve too much cognitive difficulty (Attardo et al. 1994: 39) is not satisfied by writing down to the reader. On the contrary, it can be argued that unless the reader is an “accomplice” in the process of resolving the incongruity of a humorous piece of discourse, s/he can have neither intellectual satisfaction nor the feeling of “in-groupness” involved in all humorous texts and perhaps more prominently in “cultural” humor. This means that what is implicit in a source text jab might fare better remaining implicit in the target jab. PNs, whether they be used referentially or attributively, activate scripts the actual content of which is obviously dependent on individual experience and individual processing of that experience “filtered . . . through institutions and social structures [the recipient] lives in” (Asimakoulas 2001: 70). The processing of PNs, however, also depends crucially on general linguocultural knowledge as to what PNs are and why they are used and such implicit knowledge is shared by members of different socio-cultural groups. For instance, familiarity with “Wilshire Boulevard” is not necessary for the reader to infer that in the specific context it is used (“a smile as wide as Wilshire Boulevard”) it stands for the prototypical member of a category of very broad and impressive boulevards.

In addition, PNs have the merit of being brief: they are single units with condensed information, they may, therefore, secure faster access to concrete, image-like scenes than descriptions (including common names) by eliminating other candidates. No description, definite or indefinite, can match a PN in these two respects. A more “generic” term (e.g. “ascetic” instead of “Tibetan” in (12b)) is equally brief but considerably less specific and, therefore, less likely to evoke an equally concrete scene (as explained in 1 above). On the other hand, a definite description (e.g. “the talented, multimillionaire who has been the president of a famous film company for 20 years”) could replace a PN (e.g. “Darryl Zanuck” in (2b)). It contains most of the relevant attributes, it is almost equally specific and, in principle, it might be sufficient to put the reader in mental contact with a uniquely determined instance of the appropriate type.
However, it would still require a search for the cross sections of different overlapping sets to arrive at the intended goal, thus lowering the level of *immediacy* and *simultaneity*. Besides, such a definite description as the one just cited may be specific enough but it is certainly not *brief*.

The brevity of the linguistic frame (a PN is a single unit) may be related to the brevity in humor resolution and the short time span of the punch line (Attardo 1997: 407). The brevity of PNs as linguistic signs combined with the assumption of shared knowledge that their use implies and the concreteness of the scene(s) they evoke seem to play a role in their efficiency as humor triggers in different types of jabs in which they may appear. It is, therefore, risky to replace them with a description (whether it be a definite or an indefinite one). It rather seems reasonable to retain allusive PNs in humorous target texts, even if only partial familiarity of the target audience with their referents is envisaged, or no familiarity but only some relevant contextual information as to the possible identity of the referent(s). Respondents’ reactions show that connotations relevant to the SO take care of themselves.

The preceding discussion is not meant to imply that successful replacement of a PN is impossible. In fact, according to the reactions of the specific respondents consulted, it may even be necessary in certain contexts. There are cases where definite or indefinite descriptions replace PNs successfully (e.g. (3b), (4b) in “The first test: Trouble is My Business” section). In those cases the replacing common nouns prove to have the following characteristics (as attested in examples (4a), (6c) in “The first test: Trouble is My Business” section): (a) they signal a prototypical member (for the target culture) of the same (or a very similar) category to the source culture one, of which the PN referent is presented as a typical member, and (b) the entity signified by the common noun is assumed to also exist in the source culture even if it does not occupy a central position in the pertinent category.

Finally, successful *compensation* is also well attested in target texts with the following characteristic: the translator has chosen a humorous device from the repertoire (i.e. the humorous tradition) of the target culture (e.g. (5b), (7b), (14b), (15b) in The first test: Trouble is My Business section). The translator as a participant in the culture of the target language and, crucially, as an informed member of that culture should know about tendencies and preferences of its members in terms of humor appreciation. Playing with register and manipulating fixed expressions are typical of Greek humor, for instance, and an active knowledge of
current, culturally grounded expressions seems invaluable for humor translation.

This study is an exploratory one and has been based on a limited amount of experimental data. No hard and fast rules can therefore be expected to result from it. It is best seen as an attempt to investigate causal interdependencies and possible conditions for the successful transference of allusive PNs in jab lines. Besides, we are still in need of a better understanding of the relation between linguistic encodings and the cognitive effort required for their decoding, an important issue for humor appreciation. Gutt (2000: 110) suggests that “unusual forms require more processing effort” and that this cost can only be counterbalanced by special gains, i.e. “special contextual effects.” I have tried to point out that in the case of unfamiliar allusive PNs used for humorous purposes, even if some cognitive effort is required, the gains are considerable: the preservation of the PN secures ambiance/credibility, participation of the target readership to problem-solving, membership of that readership to the pertinent “knowledgeable group,” brevity (considered important for punch lines), and concreteness of simultaneously activated, image-like scenes.

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Notes
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1. Chandler himself makes the following comments on his style in a letter: “It is no easy trick to keep your characters in your story operating on a level which is understandable to the semi-literate public and at the same time give them some intellectual and artistic overtones which that public does not seek or demand or, in effect, recognize but which somehow subconsciously it accepts and likes. My theory has always been that the public will accept style provided you do not call it style either in words or by, as it were, standing off and admiring it.” (Gardiner and Walker 1997: 61).
2. In a similar vein, Asimakoulas (2001: 75) argues that a number of allusive references in his data (comedy subtitling from English into Greek) are lost because the application of minimum change (as a translation strategy) “cannot render the connotational or contextual meaning.” One of his important observations springs from the retention of the PN “Ethel Merman” in the subtitled text, through which reference is made to a popular personality of the source culture, untraceable for target audiences because of the lapse in time: “humor heavily relies on contemporary facts” he notes (ibid.: 76).
3. The ordering of the strategies is reportedly based on Levy’s (1967) minimax idea implying minimum of effort, maximum of effect (Leppihalme 1997: 105).
4. The terms *adequacy* and *acceptability* refer to Toury’s (1995: 56–57) well known scale: “adherence to source norms determines a translation’s *adequacy* as compared to the source text, subscription to norms originating in the target culture determines its *acceptability*.”

5. Humorous discourse presupposes (perhaps more than serious discourse) common cognitive schemas (my translation).

6. For the purposes of the initial study, PNs not preserved in the TT were listed separately and respondents were asked to perform recognition and listing of features tasks.

7. In order to confirm the hypothesis that PNs were preserved mainly on the basis of assumed familiarity, I also included Group A respondents because, unlike the young respondents of group B, they belonged to the readers targeted when the TT was produced in the 80s.

8. Notice that the TT is produced in the early 80s, just before basketball players occupied the central positions of the same category in Greece. Even so, however, the tough guy script is probably better preserved (and contextually more relevant) than the one evoked by “basketball player.”

9. This line can be understood as containing three jabs, where each PN evokes the second script of three separate SOs, featuring the actual detective (with all concomitant connotations). Even so, however, an overall SO is also present characterised by the clash between “tough guy” and “ladies’ man.”

10. Unless otherwise indicated, suggested alternatives were provided by the author.

11. Tsakona (i.p.) analyzing Greek short stories explains it as “useless details.”

12. Notice that in Attardo et al. (2002: 19) “exaggeration” is understood as a kind of faulty reasoning. In the cases discussed here, however, there is also a blatant violation of the quantity maxim besides the violation of the maxim of relevance (Grice 1975). In this sense, overspecification examples are similar to “stating the obvious” cases (e.g. Holmes and Marra 2002: 76). So, although exaggeration as an instance of faulty reasoning is present, additional features are also exhibited that relate these cases to others that may not necessarily involve exaggeration. Besides, overspecification can also be interpreted as register clash: accurate and detailed information giving the impression of scientific discourse clashes with trivial content. Hence “register” may appear under the LA KR.

13. “Paleness” is what the two scripts share. In structuralist terms, as noted by one of the reviewers, “paleness” is the *tertium comparationis* of a comparable *comparé* and *comparant* pair. In GTVH terms, the opposed scripts are: a) Hamlet’s father (who is pale) being a ghost and b) Philip Marlowe (who is pale) being shocked.

14. Admittedly, I have no comments from respondents who would require information about Hamlet’s father to know that he is a ghost, so audience design considerations are clearly paramount here. Notice, however, that for readers unfamiliar with the play, the joke would rely on overspecification, since “you look like a ghost” would be propositionally and functionally sufficient.

15. From what we know about Chandler’s style (see Gardiner and Walker 1997: 58 and note 1) we can imagine that the choice of “Finnegan” as a PN here is not accidental. The author might be referring to Joyce’s “Finnegan’s Wake” and not simply using an ordinary PN implying Irish origin. The intertextual connection was made in fact by some respondents.

16. Following GTVH practice, one should recognize the existence of two jabs here: one involving the clash of contextual information on Marlowe’s personality vs. asceticism and another one involving the opposition between being a full-time and a part-time monk. For present purposes, though, I analyze this line as a single jab and I suggest that it may work as an instance of hyperdetermination (Attardo 2001: 100).
17. All the suggested alternatives under (13c) were offered to the respondents, who were (in this case only) asked to choose one of these and provide ratings. There was a marked difference between Group A and Group B respondents with the former group preferring the St. Cecilia rendition and the latter being split between the remaining two alternatives. The ratings for (13c) were: Group A: “very amusing” 14 percent, “amusing” 81 percent, and “non-amusing” 5 percent and Group B: “very amusing” 10 percent, “amusing” 70 percent, and “non-amusing” 20 percent. For (13a) the ratings were: “very amusing” 2 percent, “amusing” 23 percent, and “non-amusing” 75 percent. Those for (13b) were: “very amusing” 6 percent, “amusing” 60 percent, and “non-amusing” 34 percent.

18. St. Cecilia was chosen simply because the name is less outlandish than St. Swithin and at the same time adaptable to the Greek morphological system. Similar instances would be St. Ignace or St. Sulpice, which would come out as Άγιος Ιγνάτιος (Agios Ignatios) and Άγιος Σουλπικίος (Agios Sulpikos), respectively, which are perceived as funny names by some Greeks.

19. The last possibility (i.e. “St. Sameday”) had been suggested by Translation students who had worked on that text three years ago as part of an assignment.

20. Although in logical-semantic terms extensions (naturally) but also intensions (perhaps less obviously) are not understood as conceptual entities, in CG both type-specifications and instances do have a conceptual basis (see Langacker 1991: 55).

21. Cf. Baker (1997: 23–26), according to whom “one of the commonest strategies for dealing with many types of non-equivalence is using a more general word (superordinate)” if the target language lacks a specific term (hyponym).

22. The term “scripts” is borrowed from Schank and Abelson (1977) and is used for the kinds of structures alternatively called “frames,” “schemas,” “cognitive models,” “scenes,” etc. The GTVH inherits the notion of scripts from Raskin (1985: 79–82). In Raskin “scripts” are informally understood as cognitive structures internalized by the speaker that represent his/her knowledge of parts of the world, including routines, standard procedures, basic situations, etc. Fillmore (1985: 223) suggests that these terms are used in a wide variety of ways and are sometimes distinguished in static vs. dynamic terms or according to the kinds of inference making they support. For my purposes, these terms could be used alternatively, as none of my arguments rests on their differences.

23. Evidently, compensation typically amounts to creating a different humorous instance in the TT. Attardo’s suggestion to humor translators is to “keep all Knowledge Resources (except Language) the same” (2002: 185) if possible, or at least to “attempt to preserve the Script Opposition of the original” (ibid.: 190) in cases of punning, for instance, a notoriously difficult problem for translation purposes. Translation experts, on the other hand, focusing on cultural material, have pointed out that “many cultural jokes do not translate well and would obviously not be humorous to native speakers of the target language” (Schmitz 2002: 107), so if “the point is to get the audience to laugh” (ibid.: 106) the translator would have to find a different joke (following Zabalbeascoa 1996).

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