

Translation of Problematic Humour in Gender-Focused *Bewitched*

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Abstract

Broadcast from the early 1960s until the early 1970s, *Bewitched* was brought into being with the intention of providing the conventional American family with a constructive emotional outlet for when they would all gather around the TV and spend quality time together. The key demographic at that time consisted of young to middle-aged couples or newlyweds with or without children, basically the real-life versions of the characters portrayed in the show. Nowadays, the target audience has considerably diminished in number as the beloved TV series is no longer on TV. It remains available online for cinephiles and movie amateurs alike. The aim of this article is to methodically translate and analyse the potential setbacks of various comic and outdated instances encountered in the TV show *Bewitched*. It also consists of a thorough investigation of possible problematic linguistic aspects, as well as different sources of humour. Moreover, the target audience will be provided with alternatives in translation and additional explanations and reasonings behind the choices made.

Keywords: illocutionary act, humour, irony, ambiguity, stereotype, gender, *Bewitched*

Introduction

The aftermath of World War II brought about a cultural shift in women's roles. After having been encouraged to play an integral part in the factories that were supporting the war effort, they were once again demoted to housewives whose love for their country was better shown in the kitchen. The propaganda effort that went into convincing women that they would be better off staying home than joining the work force was not entirely successful. Starting with the 1950s, many women took jobs to help maintain their families' standard way of living, so much so that during that time, approximately 33% of the work force was made up of both married and single women, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The television industry was part of this gender stereotype and brought into being TV shows featuring leading male characters at first, as these shows were usually the most successful. The earliest television representations of the family included images of ethnic and socioeconomic differences that slowly disappeared in order to accommodate the white, middle-class family narrative of the 1950s, that has become representative for the American identity of that time (Press 139). Even with a few notable female characters of the 1950s sitcoms in mind, such as Lucille Ball's Lucy Ricardo and Donna Stone's Donna Reed, women were still severely underrepresented or portrayed in a sexist manner. The common archetype included a spotless household, a housewife dominated by her husband and a few punchlines denoting everyday situational humour. Ironically, these daily exchanges between family members are what sparked the interest of the masses, as well as their will to laugh.

A few years after the end of World War II, people were trying to live their lives to reflect the new political reality of those times. As a result, several situational comedies whose focal point was the ideal American family started to take shape and were broadcast on national TV. A pertinent example whose sexist and stereotypical framework can be deduced right from the very title, is *Father Knows Best*, a TV show that was picked up by CBS and

NBC for a total of 6 years, from 1954 to 1960. It tells the story of the Johnson family, who desperately tries to navigate the daily tensions with a hint of drama and comedy. The man of the house is Jim Anderson, and he is married to a down-to-earth woman, Betty. Together, they have three children, Betty, Bud, and Kathy who, whenever they are in need of advice, turn to their father, because he knows best, or so they think. One episode that stands against this statement is the thirtieth of the second season, entitled *Betty, Girl Engineer*, in which the eldest daughter enthusiastically signs up for on-the-job instruction as an engineer through her high school's vocational guidance program, when the supervisor thought she was signing up for a secretary position. She even uses her initials, BJ. One can only guess if the intention was, in fact, to hide her true identity or to stir very specific innuendos in the mind of the audience. Not only is her father taken completely aback by the fact that she would be the only female in the program, but he also expresses his surprise that the program would let a girl sign up.

At what might seem like the other side of the misogynistic spectrum, is Lucy Ricardo from *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957). An episode worth noting is *Job Switching*, in which both her and her friend's husband think that housework is easier than any real job, so they switch roles: men in the kitchen and women in the factory. This was the perfect opportunity to prove that women are just as hardworking as men, but the screenwriters decided to follow a more traditional pattern. Some critics would argue that, because of the return to her domesticity at the end of each day after controversially trying to defeat gender stereotypes throughout an entire episode, the show would fall into the category of conventional 1950s sitcoms. Although one cannot deny that, it is also possible that the series was subtly testing the social and political waters to decide when it would have been an appropriate time to break the gender norms.

A decade later, during the 1960s, as though paving the way for the feminist movement, women were starting to get cast in leading roles, often alongside men, since the TV shows concerning life as a couple seemed to catch the public's eye. *Bewitched* (1964-1972) is such an example. With a female protagonist, the plot

thickens when the audience finds out that she is a witch and that she can do things her husband cannot. Throughout the series, she performs magical acts that he benefits from in terms of his career, and she manages to juggle being a housewife and a witch with almost impeccable ease. However, she sometimes expresses her willingness to give up her magical powers for the sake of becoming ordinary, like her husband, a remnant of the times when women were, by definition, extensions of the opposite sex and not full-fledged individuals. Apart from that, there were a few episodes with a more progressive subtext, such as the one in which Samantha and her aunts are protesting the prejudices and wrongful representation that surround witches on Halloween, and the one in which the main character teaches her husband's racist client a lesson.

Hidden behind the jokes, the laughter and the magic spells, the wife that has more power than her husband turned Samantha Stephens into a feminist icon. The underlying context, however, teaches the audience that "even capable women should curb their power, charmingly, to suit men and survive in their world" (Ojalvo). But Samantha's character does not follow the usual arc inscribed with situations that shape her into bettering herself or crucial moments when she has to take a decision that would drastically change her entire life. It is obvious, even from the beginning of the show that she has not embarked on a journey that would end in character development, but in character degeneration. Her daily routine consists of her moderating and modulating herself to please others, mostly men. When she willingly tells her husband that she is a witch, he insists she acts like a regular wife, no magic spells, potions, or odd behaviour. His attitude changes when he is the one in need of magical assistance.

All these seemingly humorous situations are somewhat emphasized by the comic language. The show succeeds in perfectly creating a significant number of comic instances that fall under different categories. With a view to better understand each one of them, they will be discussed in what follows.

Instances of Wordplay. A Case Study.

In season 2, episode 35, *The Catnapper*, Darrin is having a busy time at work. He managed to secure a strong advertising campaign for a cosmetics company, and he has been leaving home early in the morning and finishing work late. It would seem only natural for Samantha to feel neglected and alone, however, she displays an understanding and supportive behaviour. It is Endora, her mother, who tries to incite her into thinking her marriage has run its course after only a couple of years.

- (a) Your mortal roommate seems to be getting the seven-year itch five years early.
- (b) What do you mean by that remark?
- (a) When a husband starts working nights, that's a different story.
- (b) Mother, don't let your suspicious little imagination run away with him. Seven-year itch indeed!
- (a) But it doesn't have to be an out-and-out itch. All it takes is a little rash. (00:04:15-40)

The humour in this situation relies on a play on the words “itch” and “rash.” The expression “seven-year itch” assumes that the level of satisfaction and spontaneity in a marriage declines after seven years. It appeared for the first time in George Axelrod's play with the same name, and it gained recognition following its film adaptation in the 1950s, starring Marilyn Monroe (Osmond). Endora implies that the itch has settled in too early and she alludes to the fact that, most of the times, working late nights at the office is just a front for an illicit affair. Samantha seems unbothered by her theories, which is when Endora suggests that sometimes, even a minor event is enough to shake the foundation of a marriage.

When translating the dialogue into Romanian, finding a proper equivalent is challenging, as the TL does not have a specific expression that could render the same comic relief as the wordplay above. One could opt for the word “monotonie,” as it is most used when talking about a stagnant relationship. However, it is difficult to pair it with a numeral and to find a correlative as strong as

“rash,” therefore the source of humour would not be the same and it would not have the same intensity as in English. The chosen pair of words, “criză – episod” is not as strong as its English counterpart “itch – rash,” which literally translates to “mâncărime – iritație.” Contextually speaking, it flows more naturally. In order to convey a meaning closer to the original and keep both numerals, I have translated the dialogue as follows:

- (a) Se pare că suferiți de criza de șapte ani cu cinci ani mai devreme.
- (b) Ce vrei să spui?
- (a) Când bărbatul lucrează până târziu e o altă poveste.
- (b) Mamă, nu lăsa imaginația să-ți joace feste. Auzi la ea, criza de șapte ani!
- (a) Nu e nevoie de o criză gravă. Un mic episod e suficient. (my translation)

Moving on, the plot reveals that Darrin’s important client is an attractive young woman. She swings by his office to check some of the sketches he has prepared for a cosmetic campaign. While explaining his vision, Darrin puts his hand gently on her shoulder, gesture that prompted a serious discussion on how she is not “interested in the flirtatious little game between the sexes.” Darrin responds by saying that he is happily married and that he finds her “resistible,” and yet, towards the end of the conversation, he makes a remark that resembles Endora’s, strengthening in a way, the cheating plot.

- (a) May we go to lunch now? Frankly, I’m starved.
- (b) OK. But I’m warning you, lady.
- (a) About what?
- (b) After lunch, I’m bringing you back to the office to show you my etchings. (00:08:00-10)

A smart pun based on two similar-sounding words, “etching” and “itching,” where the former denotes “a picture produced by printing from a metal plate that has been etched with acid”

(“Etching”), while the latter, although it is only subtextually present, may be seen as an allusion to the “seven-year itch” mentioned earlier. In this case, its rendition into the TL would be:

- (a) Putem merge să mâncăm? Sunt lihnită.
- (b) Bine. Dar te avertizez, domnișoară.
- (a) În legătură cu ce?
- (b) După prânz, ne întoarcem la birou să îți arăt câteva scheme. (my translation)

Given the fact that Darrin works in advertising, and he draws different sketches for numerous ad campaigns, the appropriate Romanian equivalent for “etching” would be “schită.” However, in order to maintain the double entendre, the synonym “schemă” was used, because it leaves room for a wider interpretation that includes sexual innuendos as well. This supposition is strengthened by Darrin’s early warning which he pronounces in a playful, yet suggestive manner.

In season 3, episode 7, *Twitch or Treat*, Endora decides to throw a Halloween party at the Stephens house. Darrin vehemently opposes, for fear their neighbors might discover the truth about Samantha and her mother. As the night sets in, the guests start arriving at the party. One couple stands out from the crowd: Boris, a warlock, and his girlfriend, Eva. She arrives as a beautiful woman but after midnight, she turns into a cat. Upon seeing her, Samantha’s Uncle Arthur makes the following remark:

- (a) I see Boris has brought his ghoulfriend. (00:12:00-03)

This is an instance of failed humour, as none of his interlocutors find the joke amusing. The made-up word “ghoulfriend” is a play on the words “girlfriend” and “ghoul.” It hints at Boris’s girlfriend being another type of supernatural being, not a witch like the rest. By definition, a ghoul is “an evil spirit which eats dead bodies” (“Ghoul”). There seems to be an incongruity between reality and the punchline, which one may

assume to be the reason why Samantha and Darrin did not find the joke that funny. In Romanian, the acceptable translation would be:

(a) Se pare că Boris și-a adus prietena-strigoi. (my translation)

The translation process affects once again the apparent wordplay and diminishes the perlocutionary effect the joke is supposed to have. However, speaking from the perspective of failed humour, the Romanian rendition is true to the original, as they both lack in comic substance.

Another similar occurrence can be noticed in season 8, episode 7, when Samantha and Darrin spend the night in a haunted castle with Darrin's boss and his wife, Larry and Louise Tate. They are woken up in the middle of the night by a series of strange noises which prompt Louise and Larry to have the following dialogue:

(a) That's certainly a ghost with a lot of spirit!

(b) You're not at your best when you try humour. (00:08:50-00:09:00)

Louise attempts to build a comic situation around the synonymy between "ghost" and "spirit." They both represent sightings of people who are thought to be dead, but the latter can also be found in the expression "to be full of spirit," which stands for an animated, vigorous person. Larry remarks that his wife does not understand the subtleties of the comic side, providing the audience with another strong example of failed humour. In translation, one might go for the antithetical concepts of life, represented by "spirit" and death, represented by "ghost." Since it is possible to replace the word "spirit" in the afore-mentioned expression with "life" and keep the meaning at the same time, the translation into Romanian would go as follows:

(a) Ce fantomă plină de viață!

(b) Nu-ți iese când încerci să fii amuzantă. (my translation)

In addition to sleeping in a haunted castle, Samantha and Darrin must deal with a ghost who has a crush on the witch and who possesses Darrin in order to get close to her. When he sees he is unsuccessful, he tries his luck with Louise, who refuses him as well. At the beginning of the possession, he tries tricking Samantha into believing he is her real husband, but to no avail. It is now that Samantha appeals to a smart double entendre:

- (a) Is that any way to treat a dear, beloved husband?
 - (b) Yes, especially when you're not my dear beloved husband!
 - (a) Now what is that supposed to mean?
 - (b) It means you're wasting your time; I can still see through you!
- (00:07:50-00:08:00)

In this situation, the phrasal verb “see through” has two meanings. One, to be able to look through something, and two, to be aware of someone's intentions to deceive you. The lore dictates that ghosts are usually translucent, allowing some light to pass through them. Consequently, Samantha's wordplay successfully hints at not only being able to see through the ghost pretending to be Darrin, but also to literally see through him to the other side. It is possible to adopt a literal translation into the TL, without diminishing the outcome:

- (a) Așa îl tratezi pe iubitul tău soț?
- (b) Da, mai ales că nu ești iubitul meu soț!
- (a) Ce vrei să spui?
- (b) Îți pierzi timpul, văd direct prin tine! (my translation)

A more controversial episode in the history of *Bewitched* is *Sisters at Heart*, a Christmas episode. The plot tackled a sensitive subject for the year in which it appeared on TV, namely racism. In this episode, Samantha and Darrin's daughter, Tabitha, is trying to be sisters with her black friend, Lisa, and ends up casting a spell that covers them both in polka-dots. Lisa, in white, and Tabitha, in black. At the beginning of the episode, however, the characters are

seen treating the subject with an open mind, as can be seen from the following dialogue between Larry Tate and Lisa's father:

- (a) If you land Buckway and Keith comes home with the Fenmore account, we'll really have a white Christmas!
- (b) Watch that! (00:02:00-10)

The humour in this situation is given by the usage of the word "white." Although meant to define the holiday, it also alludes to race. The fact that Lisa's father, an Afro-American man, is the one who points out the double meaning, makes it acceptable for the other characters and for the audience to laugh in this circumstance. In Romanian, the literal translation does not do justice to the spirit of the joke. The word "white" refers mostly to snow, but it can also hint at a happy and joyful Christmas. The literal translation, "Crăciun alb" is not that common in the TL, which is why the intention is to keep this underlying opposition between light and dark, black and white, and transpose it into Romanian. In doing so, I was able to come up with the following result:

- (a) Dacă tu îl convingi pe Buckway și Keith pe Fenmore, chiar o să avem un Crăciun luminos!
- (b) Ai grijă ce spui! (my translation)

Later in the episode, when Larry and Darrin's client makes a few racist comments, Samantha decides to teach him a lesson and casts a spell that makes everybody around him appear as black people, including himself. Following this incident, Samantha makes a witty remark:

- (a) What was that all about?
- (b) I don't know, but I think Mr. Brockway is dreaming of a black Christmas! (00:21:25-30)

This is an allusion to the song "White Christmas" by Irving Berlin, whose first line is exactly that, "I'm dreaming of a White Christmas." Being the only one who knew about the spell, she

decides to make this inside joke inspired by Larry's previous one. In translation, if one chooses the opposite of "luminos," just like "black" is to "white," it might hinder the overall understanding, as "întunecat" would not satisfy the comic requirements. Instead, I opted for:

- (a) Ce s-a întâmplat?
- (b) Nu ştiu, dar cred că dl Brockway va sărbători un Crăciun mai colorat! (my translation)

In season 5, episode 19, *Samantha the Sculptress*, the opening scene shows Darrin in a peculiar position – eating flowers. Samantha sees him and immediately assumes the most plausible explanation and the most likely culprit, Endora. Consequently, she starts yelling at the ceiling:

- (a) Mother, will you come here right away and de-spell Darrin? Your joke is in very poor taste! No pun intended. (00:04:10-20)

The punning element in this case is the syntagm "poor taste." Given that Darrin is literally eating flowers, one may assume it is not a very pleasant experience, hence one of the two meanings of the pun. The second meaning would be the allusion to Endora's failed joke. "In poor taste" is a synonym for "rude," "offensive" and "insulting." In translation, the chosen equivalent follows the same criteria as in the SL:

- (a) Mamă, vino aici şi ridică vraja de pe Darrin! Gluma e de prost gust. (my translation)

The expression "de prost gust" is polysemantic, just like its English back translation.

In addition to the puns used throughout the dialogues, the titles of some episodes make interesting topics for analysis as well. Most of the titles were notorious quotes or sayings humoristically adapted with a view to inciting laughter and summarizing the plot in a funny way. The 8th episode of the last season, *TV or Not TV*, is

a readaptation of the classic Shakespearean line “To be or not to be.” So is the first episode of the seventh season, entitled *To Go or Not to Go, That is the Question*. This seems to be a favourite, because it is seen twice more, in season 6, episode 7, *To Trick or Treat or Not to Trick or Treat* and in season 4, episode 25, *To Twitch or Not to Twitch*.

The Romanian translation of the famous line is “A fi sau a nu fi: aceasta e întrebarea.” With that in mind, the names of the episodes mentioned above would have the following equivalents when translated into the TL:

S04E25: A face sau a nu face vrăji

S06E07: A colinda sau a nu colinda de Halloween

S07E01: A pleca sau a rămâne: aceasta e întrebarea

S08E08: A apărea sau a nu apărea la TV (my translation)

Most of them kept the initial structure of the original line, with one long-infinitive verb repeating twice, once in the affirmative form and then in the negative form. In the season-seven episode, however, the preference was to use a verb and its antonym to better emphasize the opposition between the two. The season-eight episode needed further clarification, otherwise the literal translation would have consisted of a noun instead of a verb, just like in the original. Since the episode revolves around Samantha and Darrin’s daughter magically appearing on TV, I have decided to translate the title of the episode by situationally explaining the plot.

The title of the 25th episode alludes to Samantha’s signature gesture. According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, “to twitch” means “to make a sudden small movement with a part of the body, usually without intending to” (“to Twitch”). However, whenever she performs a spell, she intentionally twitches her nose in preparation for what is to come. Given that her gesture is always followed by magic, the version I opted for in the TL carries an extrapolation of the original meaning.

Illocutionary Acts in Translation

A few representative instances of speech acts and the challenges that arise from trying to translate them into Romanian will be presented in what follows. To do so, it is necessary to take a look back at some episodes that have already been discussed as well as introduce several more.

During season 1, episode 33, I came across the illocutionary act of betting. After turning into a different woman and trying to make a move on Darrin to boost his self-esteem, Samantha returns home and shares her experience with her mother.

- (a) He behaved beautifully. He rejected me completely. I wonder if I ought to act a little jealous when he tells me.
- (b) You really think he'll tell you about his little encounter?
- (a) Of course, we have no secrets. Darrin tells me everything.
- (b) Wanna bet? (00:19:10-20)

In this exchange, the goal of Endora's final line is to amuse the audience with a simple utterance turned humorous by the context. In appearance, what is being said literally does not seem to have an underlying meaning, but it has exactly the intended effect, which is to amuse. Additionally, another significant source of humour comes from the oppositeness of Samantha's first two sentences. In Romanian, these occurrences can be translated literally without affecting the perlocutionary act of the utterance.

- (a) S-a comportat frumos. M-a respins complet. Mă întreb dacă să mă prefac geloasă.
- (b) Crezi că o să-ți spună despre întâlnire?
- (a) Desigur, nu avem secrete. Ne spunem tot.
- (b) Punem pariu? (my translation)

Another relevant example can be found in the 20th episode of the third season, *The Corn Is as High as a Guernsey's Eye*. In this case, an instance of apologizing is exemplified. Louise Tate is babysitting Samantha's daughter, Tabitha, while the witch is trying

to turn Aunt Clara back to normal. For fear her neighbour might stumble across a cow in her house and start asking questions, Samantha rushes her out of the door:

- (a) I'm sorry you have to rush off.
- (b) But I don't.
- (a) That's right, you don't.
- (b) Then why am I leaving?
- (a) Because I'm in such a hurry. (00:11:55-00:12:05)

This exchange was prompted by Samantha expressing her disappointment that Louise has to leave. She even apologizes in her place, which is why this instance presents comic traits. The phenomenon of oppositeness is seen once again, as one's lines contradict the other's. In Romanian, the translation is in line with the original meaning, as the ambiguity of the situation can be expressed almost in the same way, at the same time staying true to the antithetical sentences:

- (a) Îmi pare rău că trebuie să pleci în grabă.
- (b) Dar nu trebuie.
- (a) Ai dreptate.
- (b) Atunci de ce o fac?
- (a) Pentru că mă grăbesc. (my translation)

Instances of Irony

For this category, I started directly with the title. By its definition, "to bewitch" means "to cast a spell on someone" or "to attract or interest someone a lot so that you have the power to influence them" ("To Bewitch"). Taking a closer look at the plot of the TV series and at the pilot episode, one might soon find this choice of name to be quite ironic. The short title, *Bewitched*, consists of an adjective that refers to the male protagonist, Darrin Stephens. However, even if Samantha being a witch, casting spells and doing magic were true, the attraction between them was genuine and voluntary. The only magic she performed, she did after having

married Darrin. The irony does not stop here. The TV show also ran for a limited period during the 1960s in Romania and the translated title has become a guidepost for the Romanian society during that time. The title was translated to *Ce vrăji a mai făcut nevasta mea*.

The translation, albeit much longer than the original, does not exactly stay true to the meaning of the TV series. The plotline and the title both imply Samantha doing magic, but this is where the resemblance stops. In fact, the female lead spends a major part of her time on screen trying to suppress this vital trait of hers for fear it might affect her marriage and her husband's job. Samantha performs magic at her husband's behest and for his benefit on more than one occasion. All these implications challenge the original translation of the title.

If it were to be translated again, I initially tried to do so from Samantha's perspective, as she is the main character, not her husband. One option would be *De-a dreptul fermecătoare* (my translation). This draws from the double meaning of the word "fermecător" which translates to "charming." It can be used to describe her personality, as well as her abilities. On the other hand, if I were to keep the male perspective in addition to the female one, the translation would read *Fermecat de-a binelea* (my translation). This instance includes both characters in the title but grants Samantha the agency she is entitled to because of her position as the protagonist and storyteller.

The opening scene of episode 12, season 5, *Weep No More, My Willow*, catches the Stephens having breakfast together. While Samantha prepares Darrin's favourite meal and serves it while it is hot, her husband does not seem to appreciate her kind gesture. This is when the following exchange happens.

- (a) There you go, sweetheart. Your favourite. Scrambled eggs and chicken livers.
- (b) Mmm.
- (a) That's what I like. Wild shouts of approval. (00:00:00-00:00:15)

This instance of negative irony suggests Samantha's indignation towards her husband. Her tone of voice gives away a slight irritation and disapproval of her man's behaviour. Referring once again to the Romanian equivalent, I have tried to combine literal translation with contextual interpretation to render a more naturally sounding ironical adaptation.

- (a) Poftim, dragule. Preferatele tale. Omletă cu ficat de pui.
- (b) Mmm.
- (a) Sunete puternice de aprobare. Preferatele mele. (my translation)

In the lines translated above, I have tried to maintain the overall tone of the dialogue. If, in the original, the irony comes from Samantha's "wild shouts of approval," in the TL, it comes from the semi-antonymy between the first and the last line, both delivered by Samantha.

Another instance of irony which evokes laughter appears earlier in *The Catnapper* in season 2, when a private detective who tries to uncover Samantha's secret has a conversation with his wife. The irony that sparks humour comes from her response to his vain plans and promises.

- (a) I'm onto something real big and you're gonna have diamonds and furs, a car, a yacht, and a mansion.
- (b) What? And leave all this? (00:05:40-50)

The scene is even more ironic once the audience notices that they leave in a small, cluttered up house. Her line is accompanied by a head nod directed towards the poorly decorated room. In this case, literal translation is appropriate to better showcase the irony.

- (a) E o descoperire mare. O să ai diamante, blănuri, o mașină, un iaht și un conac.
- (b) Și să renunț la toate astea? (my translation)

Instances of Ambiguity

Circling back to *Twitch or Treat*, during Endora's Halloween party, Samantha encourages Darrin to have a glass of champagne off a floating tray. She tries to convince him using the following argument:

- (a) Have some champagne darling, I'm sure it's a very good year.
- (b) For whom? (00:09:00-10)

His retort, which is delivered in the form of a question, emphasizes the humour stemming from the polysemy of Samantha's incentive. It also carries with it a form of ambiguity, mostly pragmatic, as at first, the sentences seem unambiguous when treated independently. It is only after Darrin's retort that the meaning and intentionality of the dialogue is questioned. The syntagm "a very good year" would seem to refer to the year when that specific champagne was made. In this case, the possibility of trying a literal translation is considerably high, as in Romanian this type of polysemy is recurrent:

- (a) Bea niște șampanie, dragule. E un an bun.
- (b) Pentru cine? (my translation)

Another humorous retort is noticeable in the opening scene of the episode entitled *The Catnapper*. Samantha and Darrin go to sleep after a long, eventful day. Darrin falls asleep the minute his head touches the pillow and starts snoring, disturbing Samantha. She decides to wake him up to let him know about it.

- (a) Darrin, you're snoring.
- (b) That's OK honey, I don't mind. (00:01:00-10)

In this dialogue, Darrin's confusion can be attributed to his sleepiness, which is what makes it even more amusing. This circumstance can be interpreted as Darrin thinking Samantha is the

one snoring, therefore she apologizes for disturbing him, which would explain his response.

- (a) Darrin, sforăi.
- (b) Nu-i nimic, draga mea. (my translation)

In translation, the afore-mentioned interpretation makes sense because the verb to snore in Romanian conjugates the same way in the first- and second-person singular. This contributes to the hilarity and pragmatic ambiguity of the situation.

Taking another look at the 29th episode of the first season, it is worth touching on the dialogue between Abner Kravitz and his wife. He is the archetype of the working man who wants a peaceful retirement and a wife who can cater to his every needs. He is ironic and condescending and never believes his wife, Gladys, when she tells him all she sees in the Stephens' house. In this episode, Samantha succeeds in making Mrs. Kravitz believe she is the one with magical powers and she ends up running back home to tell her husband what she discovered, trying to prove her powers to him.

- (a) You write down a number on a piece of paper and I'll tell you what it is.
- (b) Write down a number? Gladys, I've got better things to do than to play games.
- (a) What? You're retired. (00:08:50-00:09:00)

In the scene above, Gladys snaps back at her husband with the view of amusing the hearer. In translation, the entire meaning of the dialogue is kept intact and accurately transposed into the TL.

- (a) Scrie un număr, iar eu o să-l ghicesc.
- (b) Să scriu un număr? Gladys, am lucruri mai bune de făcut.
- (a) Cum ar fi? Ești pensionar! (my translation)

Situational Humour

In the pilot, titled *I, Darrin, Take This Witch, Samantha*, the audience is introduced to the newlyweds, Samantha and Darrin. On

the first night of their honeymoon, after receiving an impromptu visit from her mother, Samantha decides to reveal her true identity to her husband, a mortal. His “race” is the reason why Endora, his mother-in-law, is not very keen on him and she makes it her mission to try and convince Samantha to break the marriage and marry a warlock instead. Her position on this matter can be observed from the very first lines of the dialogue:

- (a) He has you under a spell, eh? These male witches are of the worst kind.
- (b) He’s not a witch.
- (a) What?
- (b) He happens to be, if you’ll excuse the expression, a normal, mortal, human being.
- (a) That’s easy! I’ll just have him trip over a rug and break an arm.
- (b) Mother, you’ll leave him alone! He’s a dear, sweet, wonderful, perfectly marvellous man!
- (a) Oh, my poor baby, he sounds simply horrible! (00:02:40-00:03:10)

From the very beginning, Endora manages to carve her reputation as an advocate for “same-race” marriages by employing humour techniques such as allusion (getting rid of Darrin once and for all) and condescension (by stating that mortal men are worse than warlocks, who she thinks are of the worst kind). The quarrel between a mother-in-law and her son-in-law is just as hilarious and fun-inducing as a mother-in-law who thinks she can cook better than her daughter-in-law, which happens to be the plotline of the 14th episode, *Samantha Meets the Folks*. As exemplified in the previous chapter, men can also be subjected to discrimination and gender stereotypes, and this would be one such case. In translation, the dialogue reads:

- (a) Te-a vrăjit, nu? Vrăjitorii ăștia sunt cei mai răi.
- (b) Nu e vrăjitor.
- (a) Poftim?
- (b) Se-ntâmplă să fie, scuză-mi limbajul, o ființă muritoare obișnuită.

- (a) Va fi ușor! Îl fac să se împiedice și să-și rupă mâna.
- (b) Ba îl lași în pace! E un bărbat dulce și minunat!
- (a) Biata de tine, pare de-a dreptul oribil! (my translation)

The entire series is sprinkled with discriminatory comments Endora makes with a view to emotionally emasculating Darrin and stripping him of his “alpha male” role. However, the mean and overbearing mother-in-law cliché does not do justice to early character portrayals of elderly women on TV, and neither does the choice of wardrobe. Endora is, for most of her appearances on screen, dressed in a long-sleeved purple dress and a see-through green cape. Samantha, also a witch, is dressed in conventional attire, mostly knee-long skirts, and monochromatic shirts.

An interesting choice of words is noticeable in Endora’s case. She calls him a “male witch,” when the more appropriate word to describe him would be “warlock.” This may be seen as a nod to sexism in language, meaning that many job names do not have an adequate correspondent for the female roles, such as female engineers, female pilots, female nurses.

In the 29th episode of the first season, entitled *Abner Kadabra*, the show exacerbates another female archetype, that of the meddling and nosey neighbour. Gladys Kravitz and her husband, Abner, live across the street from the Stephens family. They would not know a thing about Samantha’s powers, had Gladys not snooped around and caught her doing magic multiple times. Samantha always denies the accusations and seems to have a logical explanation for everything. In this episode, Gladys sees Samantha moving a few pictures on the wall with the help of magic, only this time, Samantha sees her too. At first, she tries to gaslight Mrs. Kravitz into thinking it was all in her head, but after seeing Mrs. Kravitz so determined to keep her story, Samantha spins the proverbial yarn the other way around, appealing to her neighbour’s ego and need for validation by using deceitful behaviour.

- (a) If those pictures did move, did it ever occur to you that you might have moved them?
- (b) Me?

(a) Every time these strange things supposedly happen, and you insist they do, you've been watching, right? Maybe you were doing more than just watching.

(b) What are you talking about?

(a) Maybe you were doing those things. I'm not sure, but it might have something to do with extrasensory perception. (00:04:50-00:05:20)

(a) Dacă tablourile chiar s-au mișcat, te-ai gândit că poate tu le-ai făcut să se miște?

(b) Eu?

(a) Mereu când s-au întâmplat aceste lucruri ai fost de față, nu-i așa? Poate nu ai fost un simplu spectator.

(b) Despre ce vorbești ?

(a) Poate tu ești de vină. Nu sunt sigură, dar cred că are de-a face cu percepția extrasenzorială. (my translation)

She succeeds in making Mrs. Kravitz believe she is the one with magical powers and she ends up running back home to tell her husband what she discovered.

(a) I've got one life and I have to live it with her.

(b) Don't let me see it! The number is 7!

(a) Wrong, it's 1! Go make lunch! (00:09:05-25)

(a) O viață am și trebuie s-o împart cu ea.

(b) Nu-mi arăta! Numărul e 7!

(a) Greșit, e 1! Du-te și pregătește prânzul! (my translation)

Other Instances of Humour

In season 7, episode 13, Tabitha wishes for a sister who does not break her toys like her brother does. Samantha tries to convince her that her brother's gesture was not intentional, but the smirk on Adam's face and him nodding his head suggest otherwise. When Darrin questions the situation, Samantha responds with what appears to be a sound-based lexical association between two rhyming words:

- (a) What's going on?
- (b) Just a little sibling-quibbling, it'll pass! (00:00:45-50)

This humorous sound similarity is what makes the audience laugh, but in translation, it loses its tongue-twisting characteristics, as there is no apparent rhyme between the equivalent words.

- (a) Ce se petrece?
- (b) O mică ciondăneală între frați. O să treacă! (my translation)

Earlier in *Twitch or Treat*, Endora's family nemesis, Uncle Arthur, is seen trying to get into the witch's good graces so he could get invited to her party as well. In hindsight, his words, mentioned below might not have been the proper way to do so:

- (a) Endora, you decorate the way you do everything else. In super-stupendous, glorious bad taste. (00:06:00-10)

Although it might have started off as a compliment, Arthur's line turned out to be an instance of putdown humour. In translation, the line comes out as an insult rather than a banter between relatives.

- (a) Endora, decorezi la fel cum faci totul. Cu un glorios și uimitor prost gust. (my translation)

To revenge, Endora fights back later with a well-thought witticism. When Arthur asks her about the time he should arrive at the party, she mercilessly cuts him off:

- (a) What time do you want the life of the party to appear?
- (b) Meaning you?
- (a) Who else?
- (b) How about half past never? (00:06:47-00:00:07:00)

Her wit and determination make it possible for the Romanian translation to be close to the original text and for the pun to partially maintain the desired result.

- (a) Când vrei să ajungă sufletul petrecerii?
- (b) Adică tu?
- (a) Cine altcineva?
- (b) În jur de niciodată. (my translation)

Returning once more to season 2, episode 35, the target audience is faced with several instances of humour on the subject of gender. The client whose account Darrin successfully managed to land turns out to be a woman, which comes as a surprise to him given that he knew her name to be Tony Devlin. Larry introduces her while Darrin has his back on both. He instantly assumes Ms. Devlin is a man because of the name, but when he sees her, he instantly apologizes.

- (a) Darrin, meet Tony Devlin, of the United Cosmetics.
- (b) I'll be right with you, Mr. Devlin. Excuse me, Ms. Devlin.
- (a) Made the same mistake myself. It's Toni with an 'i'. (00:06:50-00:07:05)

The confusion seems to stem from word spelling. Names ending in 'y' are more common among men than among women and Toni appears to be unisex. In Romanian, female names often end in 'a.' The name "Toni," written with an 'i' is the norm in the TL for male names. In translation, the adaptation will stay true to this rule.

- (a) Darrin, fă cunoștință cu Toni Devlin de la United Cosmetics.
- (b) Un moment, dle Devlin. Îmi cer scuze, dnă Devlin.
- (a) Am făcut aceeași gafă. E Toni, de la Tonia. (my translation)

In this case, Tonia can be considered the short version of Antonia.

In the same episode, the detective who is hell-bent on revealing Samantha's magical side offers the audience a Freudian slip. Believing it has something to do with the unconscious mind and repressed feelings, this type of mistake has become a significant source of humour. While conversing with his wife, the detective gives away the true nature of his job:

(a) I'm serious, honey. Do you remember a few weeks ago I was doing a little snooping, I mean investigating, for this baby food company? (00:06:02-10)

The audience can observe that from his perspective, "snooping" and "investigating" are interchangeable words. This impromptu and involuntary mistake alludes to the hidden illicitness of his character.

(a) Vorbesc serios, draga mea.

(b) Mai ții minte când am dat târcoale, adică am investigat fabrica de mâncare pentru bebeluși? (my translation)

The humour in translation becomes apparent when analysing the two apparently similar terms, "a da târcoale" and "a investiga." Seemingly synonyms, there is a major difference in terms of connotations. The initial slip-up suggests something one would not willingly disclose to anyone, while "a investiga" is a simple word used in connection with a detective's job.

An instance of self-teasing humour comes from the nosey neighbour archetype, Gladys Kravitz, in the 29th episode of the first season.

(a) All along, I've said there were crazy things going on in this house. People appearing and disappearing and furniture moving around!

(b) It must be your imagination.

(a) I have no imagination. (00:02:50-00:03:10)

In translation, simply admitting to not having imagination would not seem rooted in pre-conceived ideas about self-presentation, which are pre-requisites for an instance like this. In both languages, Mrs. Kravitz's last line vehemently denies her the benefit of the doubt, as she is the one admitting to lacking in imagination for humorous purposes.

(a) Știam eu că se petrece ceva ciudat. Oameni apărând și dispărând
și mobila mutându-se de capul ei!

(b) Imaginația vă joacă feste.

(a) Ba îmi lipsește cu desăvârșire. (my translation)

Once again, the titles of the episodes are a rich source of humour. The episode entitled *Abner Kadabra* represents an instance of paronymy and phonetic distance, as it is very similar in pronunciation with the magic word "Abracadabra." As this word is present in both languages, I kept the structure and translated it simply as *Abnercadabra*.

The last episode of the show, *The Truth, Nothing But the Truth, So Help Me Sam* is an instance of word substitution. Starting from the cliché "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God," which is meant to highlight the importance and uttermost veracity of a statement, the title indicates a type of distortion with the aim of providing a humorous effect. Translated into Romanian, the title would read *Adevărul și numai adevărul, așa să-mi ajute Samantha*. Changing the original formulation in its entirety is a source of humour.

Conclusions

After presenting, translating, and analysing a number of humorous passages, it is possible to draw several significant conclusions.

First, the TV show presents a notable and diversified number of humorous instances that are relevant for the scope of the article. From speech acts and irony to distortion and ambiguity, the selected excerpts succeed in catching and exemplifying the

substantial comedic characteristics that make *Bewitched* fall under the classification of a sitcom. The barriers encountered consisted mostly of wordplay and puns, speech acts, self-deprecating jokes, failed humour, irony and sarcasm, as well as conversational and verbal humour. Most of the times, a literal translation was possible, but when it was not, I had to resort to specific adaptation and extrapolation techniques. In the end, the first objective, that of offering an accurate and loyal translation, was achieved.

Secondly, the TV show makes an interesting subject for translation, as it is ridden with phrases and situations that would challenge a translator both linguistically and culturally. Wordplay and witticism require extrapolation and adaptation, while several instances of humour can be translated literally, if the context and register allow it.

Lastly, although not specifically presented through language and vocabulary, certain examples show underlying features of double standards through the situations depicted, the attitudes adopted by the characters and the evolution of the plotlines.

Regarding the desired effect of the translation on the audience, it can be said that 60 years ago, the dry, domestic comedy would have scored differently on the rating charts than nowadays. The conventional American family is no longer at the heart of consumerism and relatability because it has been replaced by plotlines which point towards inclusiveness, representation, and political correctness. Unfortunately, that rarely leaves room for humour.

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