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Ambiguity in Translation

(Diplomová práce)
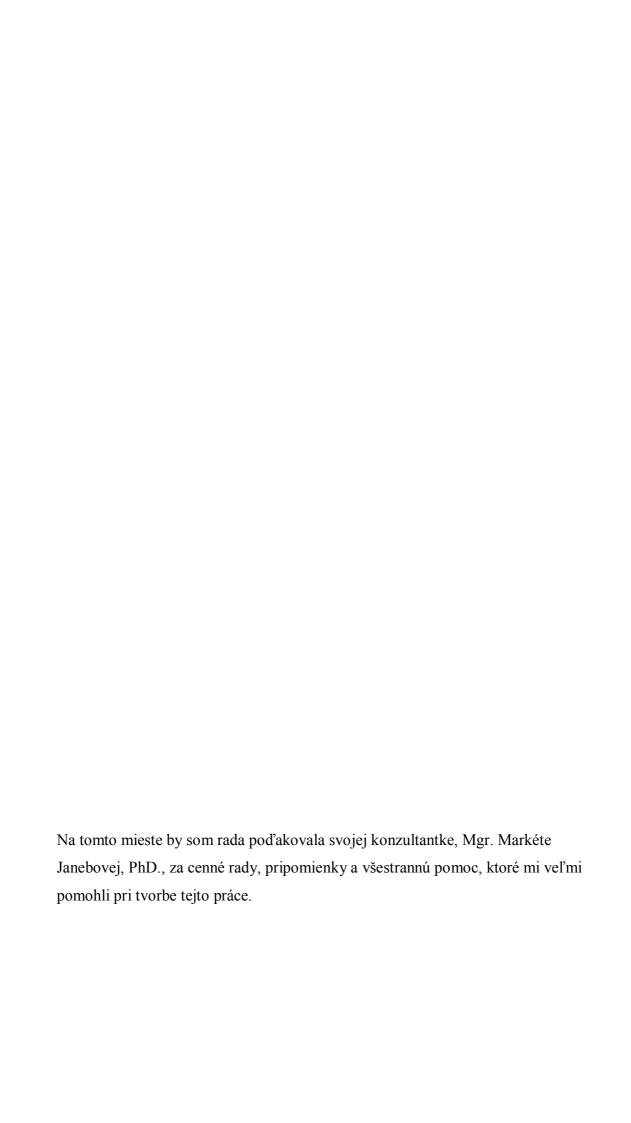
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Prehlasujem, že som túto diplomovú prácu vypracovala samostatne a uviedla úplný

zoznam citovanej a použitej literatúry.

V Olomouci dňa 17. mája 2010 ....

ZOZNAM POUŽITÝCH SKRATIEK

V praktickej časti práce sú použité skratky označujúce konkrétne jednotlivé epizódy seriálov *Frasier* a *The Big Bang Theory,* z ktorých pochádzajú uvedené príklady.

S – season (séria)

E – episode (epizóda)

Za každou z nich nasleduje číslo označujúce poradie, napr. S04E12 – séria číslo 4, epizóda číslo 12. Ku každému číslu je priradený konkrétny názov epizódy ako v anglickom, tak v českom jazyku.

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INTRODUCTION

Ambiguity is a language phenomenon that we stumble upon every day. It may be viewed either as an undesirable phenomenon (in terms of everyday communication), or as a plausible tool for the creation of wordplay. Words, phrases, clauses and sentences that can be interpreted in more than one way are a rich source of humour to those who are able to resolve the ambiguity, or, even more importantly, recognize ambiguities in a text in the first place.

There are various kinds of ambiguity in language. It represents one of the biggest challenges for translators. Since languages all over the world are more or less different in many ways, to translate a text that contains some type of ambiguity may be a very difficult task. The translators face the question whether the ambiguity of the original work is to be maintained or not, whether substitute it by something else (even if it is equally effective), or whether not to attempt to translate it at all and provide an appropriate explanation. Every solution has both its advantages and disadvantages and it is often more than difficult to decide which one of them is the best. The problem occurs also in case when the original text itself is ambiguous (although it was not the author's intention), and therefore it is the interpreter's duty to resolve the ambiguity and provide correct translation. In this thesis I am attempting to summarize facts about ambiguities in English language, the ways of detecting, resolving and translating them to Czech language, and trying to demonstrate on a translation of two particular texts – more particularly, on examples of ambiguity extracted from two highly successful American sitcoms – *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

The first section of the theoretical part attempts to define the phenomenon of ambiguity. It also points out a similar one – vagueness – which often gets confused with ambiguity, and finally introduces possible advantages of ambiguity.

The very first step to successful interpretation of ambiguity is undoubtedly its mere recognition in text/discourse. As was already mentioned, there are many types of linguistic ambiguity that can be traced there. The second chapter attempts to list them and provide explanations for their individual differences and peculiarities where necessary (see Evans 2006, Small et al. 1988, MacDonald et al. 1994 and Kreidler 1998, among others).

The next section focuses on the recognition or detection of ambiguity in the text. At times there may be doubt or uncertainty about its existence, so I am attempting to list several ways of proving it (see works of Kempson 1999, Saeed 2003 or Murphy 2010).

A lot has already been written on the resolution of ambiguity, which is another important condition for its eventual successful translation. It is necessary not only to determine a piece of text as ambiguous, but also to know why – in other words, what possible interpretations it could have. Different kinds of ambiguities can be treated in different ways and by different mechanisms, however, there are things that both syntactic and lexical ambiguities have in common and need to be taken into consideration (see Kellas et al. 1999, Burgess et al. 1989, Trueswell 1996, MacDonald, Pearlmutter and Seidenberg 1994, and Trueswell and Tanenhaus 1994, among others). The next section of the thesis therefore focuses on ambiguity resolution, its individual methods and approaches towards it.

As was already mentioned above, probably the trickiest part of the process is the translation of ambiguity itself. There are cases and texts in which it even may

seem almost impossible. However, once an ambiguity is a part of a text, it cannot be just overlooked or skipped (although, unfortunately, it also happens a lot). There are various approaches towards not only translation of ambiguity, but in general, towards the translation of idioms, unique cultural phenomena and many others (see Hickey 1998, Delabastita 1993, and Fawcett 1997, among others). The final section of the theoretical part of the thesis brings to attention several individual techniques, approaches and opinions about how to deal with ambiguities in translation (more particularly in translation of TV series' fictional discourse).

The thesis will conclude in its practical part. In the practical part, I would like to demonstrate theoretical approaches that have been summarized in the theoretical part. For this purpose I have chosen two particular American sitcoms – *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*. The reason I chose samples from these particular TV series and their Czech translation is the fact that ambiguity, as was already mentioned, often occurs as a source of humour, of which there is much (both series include a numerous jokes that are based on ambiguity). Furthermore, both chosen sitcoms cover different spheres of life of highly educated protagonists (psychiatrists in *Frasier* and physicists in *The Big Bang Theory*) whose speech, on one hand, is cultivated and contains elevated humour. On the other hand, situations that are common in every day life are presented in both series, so with the language of people of superior intellect on one side, there is also usual language of simpler people of various professions. This diversity should not only ensure enough material to demonstrate all possible kinds of ambiguity. My aim is to point out the successful pieces of translation, as well as the ones of lesser quality, and come up with a better version where possible.

1 DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF AMBIGUITY

Ambiguity is a phenomenon that is quite frequent and causes many problems in linguistics – both for linguists as well as mere users of the languages. On the other hand, its efficiency in creation of puns and jokes cannot be overlooked. Of course, the effect of jokes and puns, creation of which is enabled by the existence of ambiguity, depends entirely on whether the recipient is able to resolve, or rather acknowledge the existence of ambiguity. In the first case, ambiguity is not desirable and advised to be avoided as much as possible, in the latter case it is, on the contrary, a source of humour and therefore widely used not only in literature. Most theorists distinguish ambiguity on a lexical level (related to single words) from ambiguity on a syntactic level (related to sentences and clauses). The resolution of both syntactic and lexical ambiguities has been a central topic of interest for many of them, since successful resolution may be crucial in order not just to understand the ambiguities, but, more importantly, to interpret and translate them correctly.

Perhaps to understand the issue clearly it is necessary to define the expression itself in linguistic terms first.

Lynne Murphy defines ambiguity as "… the state of having more than one possible sense" (2010, 84), which applies not only to individual words, but to entire sentences as well.

Geoffrey Leech offers a more elaborate definition for ambiguity: "… a lack of unresolved semantic choice in the text itself, at the level of linguistic semantics that applies, for example, to meanings as defined in a dictionary." (2008, 192)

To pick the best out of both of them and put it plainly, ambiguity in language is a quality that creates more than one possible interpretation of words, phrases, sentences, and even entire texts.

To provide an opposite point of view, some linguists seem to demean the concept of ambiguity and even deny its existence in practice. Therefore, they do not consider it a part of common language, arguing that ambiguous words are too few to matter, and that in real speech, the context is almost always disambiguating (Small et al. 1988, 272). Jacob Mey (2001, 12), for instance, states: "In real life, that is, among real language users, there is no such thing as ambiguity – excepting certain, rather special occasions, on which one tries to deceive one's partner, or 'keep a door open'. A famous example is the answer that the ancient oracle in Delphi gave the king of Epirus, Pyrrhus, when he asked what would happen if he attacked the Romans. The answer was that the king would destroy a great empire; whereupon he set out to win the battle, but lose the war, thus ultimately fulfilling the prophecy and destroying his own empire."

However, what Mey describes here better fits the definition of *vagueness* rather than ambiguity (see section 2.1).

It may be true that unless one is trying to deceive, ambiguity is highly undesirable. Being deliberately ambiguous in an everyday situation is definitely something that we all should aspire to avoid.

Generally, ambiguity can usually be avoided, which has its consequences in the fact that its existence can appear doubtful – however, let us not forget the fact that in some cases, it can also occur unconsciously, without the intention to mislead.

1.1   Ambiguity and vagueness

Ambiguity itself may be a confusing term. It is necessary to recognize it from other phenomena of language, such as *vagueness.*

Although the effects of both ambiguity and vagueness can be very similar on people's linguistic perception, they are completely different linguistic phenomena. Lynne Murphy's definition of vagueness says that "If an expression is vague its meaning is imprecise, but if it is ambiguous, it has at least two separate senses." (2010, 84)

Hughes'and Lavery's explanation of vagueness is somewhat extended: "An ambiguous sentence is one that has two or more different but usually quite precise meanings. A vague sentence is one that lacks precise meaning …. Except in jokes and when it serves a clear literary purpose, ambiguity is something we must avoid. Vague sentences, however, are necessary if we are trying to express a vague thought or feeling." (2004, 63)

Example (1)   *"I am not a nuclear energy proponent."* Barack Obama, December 30, 2007 (National Review Online 2010)

Example (2)   *"I've been in the Bible every day since I've been the president."* George W. Bush, November 12, 2008 (About.Com 2010)

Example (1) is a *vague* statement by Barack Obama who claims not to be in favour of nuclear energy. However, he does not specifically say that he is against it, either. Example (2) is an *ambiguous* statement by George W. Bush. It can either mean that he has read the Bible, or that he has been mentioned in the Bible every day

since he has been the president. (However, the ambiguity here presumably was not intentional.)

It may be very difficult to distinguish vagueness from ambiguity. The essential difference between them is that a vague statement may have a continuous number of interpretations and the boundaries between the vague word/phrase/text itself and its meaning are not specified (i.e. the individual interpretations do not necessarily rule out each other), whereas ambiguous phrase's structure allows more than one interpretation (usually two or three, either/or).

1.2   Possible benefits of ambiguity

It has already been mentioned that ambiguity as a source of pleasure is usually welcome while in common communication between people it is best to try to avoid it. It can be argued, though, whether ambiguity in everyday life is always undesirable. Although not many people realize that, there are (not only) conversational situations in which it is commonly used. And not only that – in some cases linguistic ambiguity is even advocated, the main supporting argument being that it makes phrases shorter and therefore spares time and energy for the speaker, as well as for the recipient. This, of course, applies only to those cases of ambiguity that can be resolved by the assistance of inference.

Thomas Wasow et al. observe that, against all logic and expectations, ambiguity is not disappearing from language and state possible benefits of ambiguity in order to explain this fact.

"Suppose there are m possible meanings to be expressed. From the point of view of the speaker, work is minimized if there is only one word expressing all m meanings, since the speaker doesn't need to think about what word to use to express

any particular meaning. From the point of view of the hearer, work is minimized if there are m distinct words (one for each meaning), since this takes the guesswork out of determining the speaker's meaning." (2005, 272)

To solve this, shall we say, conflict of interests, the hearer and the speaker meet halfway. There is "… a compromise in which the number of words is more than one but les than m. That entails that ambiguity should exist." (Wasow 2005, 272)

Example (3): *Aretha Franklin is a big singer.*

If someone says a sentence like that, it may be unclear whether they mean that Aretha Franklin is a well-known singer of great qualities or simply that she is overweight. If the speaker intends to express both possibilities as true, not only a sentence like that covers them both, but (in the right context) it also makes the statement of fatness sound softer, if not even less offensive.

However, it must be noted that for instance *Webster New World Dictionary* includes two possible definitions of the word *ambiguous,* one of them being "having two or more meanings", the other one being "not clear; vague", the latter of which we cannot, considering what has been mentioned above, agree with. What the dictionary defines in this case is *vagueness* (event the word *vague* itself is used in the definition), which is a different phenomenon (see section 2.1).

2 TYPES OF AMBIGUITY

Ambiguity in terms of linguistics can be categorized into several kinds. The most obvious classification lies in the existence of **lexical** and **syntactic** ambiguity.

2.1 Lexical ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity is one of the most usual problems to be dealt with in word comprehension. Once we have stated the difference between ambiguity and vagueness, let us focus on the ambiguity itself.

Small et al. mention two major types of lexical ambiguity: *structural* (the ambiguity of word categories. Its existence has its roots in the fact that individual word categories often include components of the same form) and *semantic* (two or more possible interpretations of one word), these two being dependent. (1988, 4)

Lynne Murphy is more specific about lexical (i.e. semantic) ambiguity and mentions two kinds: the first one includes *homonymy, homophony and homography* and the second one includes *polysemy* (2010, 84). Here, of course, the difference between simple ambiguity, polysemy, homonymy and homophony and homography has to be explained. They can all be classified as subtypes of lexical ambiguity.

"Polysemy is the phenomenon where a single linguistic unit exhibits multiple distinct yet related meanings." (Evans et al. 2006, 36) This simple definition of polysemy shows that it is a type of ambiguity, but it cannot be equated with it. Polysemous words, such as *gas*, may cause the ambiguity in a sentence like the following:

Example (4): *"Eat here and get gas."* (a sign at a gas eatery, Gray Area, 2011)

The word *gas* in a sentence like this could have at least two meanings – it could either mean gasoline, the kind of liquid that is used to run cars, or stomach gas usually caused by inappropriate diet. They are two different meanings, but they share the quality of a substance that is not solid and has a specific smell.

Homonymy, homography and homophony apparently all have something in common. There are, however, some important differences. It is easy to confuse polysemy with homonymy, since at the first sight, they may appear to be the same. "*Homonymy* refers to words whose various definitions are unrelated, as in the two uses of **ball** in *They danced till dawn at the ball* versus *This dog can be entertained all day with a* **ball**." (Small et al., 1988, 4) The difference therefore proves to be that homonyms' meanings are unrelated, while polysemous words always share something about their meanings.

What also may help when looking up the words in dictionaries is the fact that most dictionaries' authors usually decide to list homophones separately (e.g. ball[1], ball[2]) while polysemous words are often listed under the same entries.

Lexical ambiguity, of course, involves also words that sound the same but graphically they are different – *homophones*. (Carter et al. 1997, 41) It is necessary to mention them as well, since when they are used in discourse, their interpretation can be just as confusing. (It is therefore obvious that ambiguity does not occur in written texts only.)

Let us illustrate on a short extract from one of the episodes of *Frasier* sitcom, in which two of the main characters, Daphne and Niles, are talking about her ex-boyfriend whom she was very fond of, but they broke up because of his incredible laziness.

Example (5): *"Daphne: 'Oh, we were mad for each other. He was very sweet and had the most gorgeous eyes you ever saw.'*

Niles: '... but?'

Daphne: 'Oh yes, that too.'" (S04E01 – *The Two Mrs Cranes*)

It is the existence of homophony that created the amusing misunderstanding in this dialogue – Niles was merely asking about the dark side of Daphne's boyfriend, while she took it as a question about his figure.

Ambiguity in speech, which is very often created by the usage of homophones, may be even more frequent than the ambiguity of the text, since it often may emerge even in situations when it had not been intended (due to, for instance, lower audibility or worsened hearing).

Similarly working are *homographs,* words that are graphically the same, but have various different meanings and often even different pronounciation (Meyer et al., 2005, 149): *read* versus *read, tear* versus *tear,* etc.

2.2   Syntactic ambiguity

Syntactic[*] ambiguity is a matter of structure – it can involve anything from long, complex sentences to short clauses or phrases. MacDonald et al. offer a simple definition: "Syntactic ambiguities arise when a sequence of words has more than one syntactic interpretation." (1994, 676) Syntactic ambiguity, however, is somewhat trickier than lexical, because it can exist on more than just one level, as we will see also further on. Charles W. Kreidler gives a detailed list of examples, based mainly

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[*] *also structural (not to be confused with what Small et al. mention as a subtype of lexical ambiguity, see section 3.1)*

on the existence of *surface* and *deep structure syntactic ambiguity,* and many subtypes of those. (1998, 169) It would be superfluous to state all of them, so let us just illustrate by one for each group.

Example (6): *The place was filled with creepy old paintings and furniture.*
Example (7): *Smashing windows may bring bad memories.*

Example (6) shows a case of surface ambiguity- it is unclear whether the two modifiers are related to both the paintings and the furniture, or just the paintings. Example (7) displays deep structure ambiguity – it is unclear whether the word smashing is a gerund or whether it simply modifies the following word (windows).

Syntactic ambiguity, just like lexical ambiguity, does not occur in written form only, but in spoken language as well. When a sentence is not written down, its punctuation, for instance, is not displayed, and it may become difficult to process. Let me illustrate on a rather famous anecdote:

"*An English professor wrote the words:* "A woman without her man is nothing" *on the board and asked his students to punctuate it correctly. All of the males in the class wrote:* "A woman, without her man, is nothing." *All the females in the class wrote*: "A woman: without her, man is nothing."" (Library Online, 2010)

There can even be a conflict between what different people may consider the more probable possibility when they stumble upon an ambiguity. Frequency, however, is one of the factors that can help during the process of its resolution (see section 4).

2.3 More approaches to classification of ambiguity

Since ambiguity is such a frequent and variable phenomenon, it can be categorized into more than just two kinds. Various authors have provided numerous classifications with helpful illustrations that can help in the process of its resolution. Grover Hudson, for instance, mentions three types of ambiguity: *lexical* (e.g. "We met at the bank") when a word has different meanings, *grouping* ("They served expensive wine and cheese"), when a word may be grouped with different other parts of the sentence, and *function* (e.g. "Visiting professors can be boring."), when all that varies is the function. (2000, 100) More than any other classification, Hudson's suggests that many types of ambiguities actually stem from lexical ambiguity.

Another categorization is offered by D. A. Cruse, who, however, claims that "It is important to realise that not all sentence ambiguity originates in lexical ambiguity, furthermore, our tests for ambiguity are not, in general, capable of discriminating lexical and non-lexical varieties." (1997, 67)

Cruse introduces ambiguity of four types: a) *pure syntactic ambiguity,* b) *quasi-syntactic ambiguity,* c) *lexico-syntactic ambiguity* and d) *pure lexical ambiguity*

Example (8 (a)): *old men and women* (*see Example (6) and section 3.3)

Example (9(b)): *The astronaut entered the atmosphere again.*

Example (10(c)): *We saw her duck.*

Example (11(d)): *He reached the bank.* (1997, 66)

Hudson's example of grouping ambiguity shows that it is very similar to what Cruse calls pure syntactic ambiguity (see Example (8)).

The borderlines between syntactic and lexical ambiguity in some cases may be quite blurry. If we consider Cruse's Example (10), for instance, we shall come to a conclusion that it is a sentence that is ambiguous syntactically as well as lexically. On one hand, there is one word that has several meanings, but there is also no doubt that it causes syntactic ambiguity (see Example (10), for instance: the word "duck" could have the meaning of an animal (i.e. it would be a noun), or of diving under water (then it would be a verb)). There is uncertainty about parts of speech, which, subsequently, causes ambiguity of the word *her* as well.

According to Hughes & Lavery**,** a kind of context exists that not only is not helpful in resolving ambiguities, but may even become their cause. The kind of ambiguity which occurs when the context does not direct us to what a specific phrase or word may refer to is called '*referential ambiguity*'. (2004, 65)

Example (12): *Viruses cause serious illnesses, and they are a source of trouble.*
It is not clear what the pronoun *they* refers to – either to viruses or to illnesses.

What is also worth mentioning but lies outside the grammatical categorization is *strategic ambiguity.* The deliberate use of ambiguity cannot be simply called deception, since although deceit may be intended, there is no way of proving it. Strategic ambiguity (and even more frequently, vagueness) is very common in politics. "Strategic ambiguity, as the label suggests, refers to purposefully being

vague in order to derive some personal or organizational benefit." (Zaremba 2010, 147)

(Note that the author uses the term *vague* when defining ambiguity. The difference between ambiguity and vagueness can be very indistinct.)

Example (13): "*I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.*" Bill Clinton, August 17, 1998 (The Washington Post 2011)

Bill Clinton was being purposefully ambiguous in his testimony in the infamous Monica Lewinsky affair – 'sexual relations' can be interpreted in two ways: either in its broader sense, simply as a sexual relationship, or in a narrower sense, as actual sexual intercourse. He was only denying the latter, while his statement could be interpreted at the same time in the broad sense as well (which was, of course, the purpose of it).

3 RECOGNITION

For an ambiguity to be successfully and appropriately treated in a text or discourse, another important step is its detection and recognition. It is often pointed out that one should not overestimate the amount of ambiguity in the texts, but on the other hand, it is also important to bear in mind that even if ambiguity was not the purpose of the author of the text, it may be perceived as such by the reader. Furthermore, recognizing ambiguity from mere vagueness is also not without importance. If indeed a word or a sentence is ambiguous, one can make sure about it by using some of the ambiguity tests. The difficulty in detecting ambiguity usually occurs on lexical level rather than syntactic.

3.1 Lexical ambiguity recognition

Ruth M. Kempson offers a test that involves using the expression *to do so too:* "In more linguistic terms, the expression *to do so too* demands identity of meaning of the two verb phrases in question. […] More formally, a sentence which is two-way ambiguous must be given two semantic representations to characterize its two meanings. Since a *do so* expression or any other verb phrase pro-form demands identity of meaning, a two-ways ambiguous sentence together with such an expression can only be two-ways ambiguous – in both of the two representations of the sentence's meaning, the pro-form expression will always be identical to it." (1999, 129)

To illustrate how this test may be of great use in proving the existence of ambiguity in a text, John I. Saeed provides an example:

Example (14): "a. *Duffy discovered a mole.*

b. *Duffy discovered a small burrowing mammal.*

c. *Duffy discovered a long dormant spy.*

d. *Duffy discovered a mole, and so did Clark.*" (2003, 61)

There is, of course, an ambiguous word, *mole*, but adding *so did Clark* to the rest of the sentence eliminates either the first or the second possible meaning of the word, and, in addition, proves that the word indeed is ambiguous.

This test is also what D. A. Cruse calls **identity test** for ambiguity. He uses an example sentence "*Mary is wearing a light coat, so is Sue.*" (1997, 62), which at first may seem to have four possible meanings (i.e. both Mary and Sue wearing light colored coats, or both Mary and Sue wearing coats that are not heavy, or Mary wearing a light colored coat while Sue wearing one that is not heavy, or the other way around). "However, the whole sentence does not have four interpretations, but two only. This is because the same reading of *light* must be selected in each part: either both ladies are wearing „undark" coats, or both are wearing „unheavy" coats. What is termed the **cross interpretation,** with each part of the sentence manifesting a different sense, is prohibited." (1997, 62)

John I. Saeed also offers the so-called **sense relations test**, relying "… on one sense being in a network of relations with certain other lexemes and another sense being in a different network." (2003, 62) This test may be used with words that have a lot of synonyms which can be divided into the above mentioned networks. Saeed himself uses the ambiguous word *run* as a good example:

Example (15): "a. *I go for a run every morning.*

b. *I go for a jog every morning.*

c. *?I go for an enclosure every morning.*

a. *He built a new run for his chickens.*

b. *He built a new enclosure for his chickens.*

c. *?He built a new jog for his chickens.*" (2003, 62)

The word *run,* as becomes apparent, therefore can mean an enclosure, or a jog, and is associated with the two networks of synonyms.

Lynne Murphy introduces three types of ambiguity test: *definition, contrast* and *zeugma* (2010, 84). Let me try to demonstrate them on a particular word, **wind***,* which, as everyone undoubtedly would agree, is definitely ambiguous.

Definition test: The word *wind,* as listed in OED, has several meanings – it can function as both a noun or a verb, and even be pronounced in two ways. For /wɪnd/ pronounciation, there are following entries: a) air that moves quickly as a result of natural forces, b) air that you swallow with food or drink; gas that is produced in your stomach or intestines that makes you feel uncomfortable, c) breath that you need when you do exercise or blow into a musical instrument, d) the group of musical instruments in an orchestra that produce sounds when you blow into them; the musicians who play these instruments, e) to make somebody unable to breathe easily for a short time f) to gently hit or rub a baby's back to make it burp.

For /waɪnd/ pronounciation, there are many more, especially phrasal verbs, so let us just present two as examples: a) to have many bends and twists, b) *wind up:* to make a clock or other mechanism work by turning a knob, handle etc.

The fact that there are so many various entries for the word of course implies that it is ambiguous. Let us, however, still test the word by **contrast.**

As Murphy says, if the word were ambiguous, it would make sense to use it, for example, in a sentence like this:

I only wind the clock up when northern wind is blowing.

The example sentence makes use of the word *wind* in the sense of moving air as well as in the sense of the phrasal verb. Contrast test therefore proved again that the word is ambiguous.

Zeugma test: Zeugma, „... the use of a verb which governs two or more nouns though the verb is literally suited only to one" (Barnet et al. 1971, 124), is helpful in ambiguity recognition because of the (in Murphy's own words) "inherent conflict" (2010, 86). In order for a word to be ambiguous, it would be possible to create a zeugma with it, such as in our example:

He was affected by northern and stomach wind.

All of the three tests proved the ambiguity of the word wind.

3.2   Syntactic ambiguity recognition

Since syntactic ambiguities are a matter of larger units (sentences, phrases), they are recognized more easily than lexical ambiguities. Lexical ambiguities, based on various meanings, may also not be detected due to insufficient knowledge of them. On the other hand, syntactic ambiguities are more difficult to process - generally,

there are more jokes based on lexical ambiguity than on syntactic. (Attardo 1994, 103)

4 RESOLUTION

Once we are certain that a case of ambiguity is present in text or speech, inevitably it has to be resolved, whether just in order to understand a joke properly or simply to find out what the speaker/writer means. The process of ambiguity resolution lies basically in being able to choose the correct interpretation of a word or a sentence. In literature, when there is a joke intended by the author, readers generally resolve the ambiguities, so to say, subconsciously (otherwise the value of humour would be lost). There is an important fact, though, which must not be overlooked – in most cases, ambiguity causing humour is usually fully intentional. Unintentional humour caused by ambiguity is not out of the question, but it happens rarely. Having enough time to produce ambiguous humorous piece of text enables the author to think thoroughly, while ambiguity in common speech is usually coincidental. One must not forget, of course, that even in literature or texts which are supposedly unambiguous, unintentional ambiguity may arise. In such cases, while the author is the only person who is aware of the correct interpretation, the reader (and subsequently, the translator) becomes confused (although, fortunately, since in these cases it is not the author's uttermost aim to deceive the reader, even if ambiguous, in many cases the text can be easily analyzed). Therefore, in many cases, resolution (that is to say, disambiguation) presumably may be one of the crucial steps to successful translation.

4.1 Approaches to resolution

It has been possible for some time, of course, to resolve ambiguities mechanically, using computers and algorithms. The attempts to bring this process (as well as machine translation) to perfection are numerous. However, since so far human mind

is still superior to machines, let us have a look at how it processes and eventually resolves ambiguity, as well as what means do we use to reach this goal.

4.2   Lexical ambiguity resolution

To put it quite simply, resolving lexical ambiguity comprises choosing the correct or the most plausible one out of from two up to a variety of options when dealing with an ambiguous word.

Earlier research in **context** effects on lexical ambiguity resolution was characteristically of separatistic nature. The prevailing opinion had been that lexical processing is autonomous and absolutely under no influence of either syntax or semantics. For example, according to Swinney and Onifer, "... lexical access appears to be an exhaustive and autonomous subroutine of the sentence comprehension process (autonomous in the sense that it does not appear to be driven or guided by previously occurring semantic information)." (1981, 232)

However, more recent tendencies favor the so-called *hybrid models,* named so by Kellas et al.: "The trend toward hybrid models has been motivated by recent research indicating that both meaning frequency and context play significant roles in ambiguity resolution." (1998, 979)

As Kellas et al. indicate, not only *context* (or, the relevant information) but also *meaning frequency* (in fact the probability of a certain word sense to be the correct one) really appear to be the main helping features in lexical disambiguation.

4.2.1 Activation

As was already mentioned, resolving lexical ambiguity mostly means assigning the correct meaning to an ambiguous word. That, as Gregory B. Simpson puts it, means that while reading a sentence that includes an ambiguous word, all of the possible meanings (or, at least those that are known to the reader and stored in their memory) come to mind for a very short time – so short that the reader does not even realize it. „The lexical ambiguity resolution process begins with exhaustive, modular access of multiple interpretations of ambiguity, and identity of the intended meaning is resolved thereafter on the basis of contextual information and dominance." (1991, 381)

This opinion may be supported by the fact that whenever an ambiguity is used to create a joke, its effect would be lost if the recipient was not able to activate the other meanings of the particular words, besides the correct one.

Example (16): "*A man was hospitalized with 6 plastic horses up his ass. The doctors described his condition as stable.*" (Atheist Think Tank, 2011)

The joke of course only becomes amusing when one realizes the two possible meanings of the word *stable.*

However, it may become questionable in terms of unintentional ambiguity. Sometimes an author of a text that contains a case of lexical ambiguity may not have intended it, but nevertheless put it there accidentally. Luckily, such ambiguities are noticed much less frequently than those that had been intended, and therefore there is no reason to think of the other possible meanings. Although it happens sometimes, the number of cases when the ambiguity was not intentional and eventually puzzled

the reader is quite low. With unintended ambiguities, there is usually enough context to resolve them (or better, enough context for the ambiguities not to even occur). However, most of the research in this mater showed that the activation always appears, even if for an extremely short period of time. For instance, Seidenberg et al. claim that regardless of syntactic or semantic constraints, every possible meaning of an ambiguous word is activated and subsequently, resolution takes place, the entire process taking no longer than 200 msec. (1982, 489)

Although the perceivers are not aware of it, they subconsciously activate all the possible meanings of a particular word (or at least those meanings with which they are familiar with).

Therefore, what usually helps a reader resolve an ambiguity is *context,* which even influences the period of time and the level to which the activation of individual meanings occurs.

4.2.2 The role of context

Context may be defined as "... continually changing surroundings, in the widest sense, that enable the participants in the communication process to interact, and in which the linguistic expressions of their interaction become intelligible. " (Mey 2001, 39) It is context, therefore, which in combination with individual senses of an ambiguous word enables the process of choosing the correct one.

This process may take place in two ways: the so-called *selective access,* when only the correct sense of the ambiguous word consciously comes to the mind of the perceiver, i.e. the context works immediately, and the so-called *multiple* (or *nonselective access),* when all available meanings of the word arise, the incorrect ones are discarded and the correct one is consciously chosen afterwards. (Burgess et

al. 1989, 620) Note that although it may seem so, this does not contradict what has been said in the previous section – activation of all the meanings always occurs, the difference lies in the perceiver's being aware of it.

Various context may be differently informative. The way in which a particular case of ambiguity is resolved depends on how strong the context is. As Schvanenveldt et al. put it: "... stronger contexts eliminate the issue of ambiguity." (1976, 244) If then the context provides enough lexical or grammatical information (i.e. it is disambiguating), the text (or discourse) as a whole is no longer ambiguous.

Example (17): "*Entire store 25% off*" (Gray Area, 2011)

Often in a mall an inscription like this can be seen. However, hardly anyone would understand this sentence as an offer to buy the whole store itself, since apparently the intended information involves only the items that are being sold there. The situational context here, therefore, is strong enough not to leave doubt about correct interpretation.

Example (18): " *I will bring my bike tomorrow if it looks nice in the morning.*" (Gray Area, 2011)

This is a sentence that a friend said to a friend. However, if someone only says this sentence and nothing else in addition, the ambiguity cannot be resolved by the context – not situational and not even linguistic.

Different contexts influence the readers' perception (and subsequently, ambiguity resolution) in different ways. *Grammatical context* (or practically the rules of grammar) helps rule out ungrammatical constructions, while *semantic context* represents semantic conditions in which a particular word only may have a particular meaning.

Example (19): *"Are you getting fit or having one?"*
Example (20): *The teacher had a baby.*

The sentence in example (19) comes from a title of an article in New Zealand Medical Journal. It contains a case of intentional ambiguity, the aim of which is to create a humorous line of a dialogue. Grammatical context helps to appreciate the humour by evoking two possible meanings of the word *fit* (it is only possible to say *getting fit* in the sense of getting healthy, and to say *have a fit* in the sense of a stroke or an episode of some kind of illness). Furthermore, grammatical context should rule out one of the possibilities (if the word *fit* was supposed to mean a stroke, it would be a noun that is countable. Therefore, there should be an indefinite article in front of it. Its absence can be explained by the fact that the author of the sentence is not a native speaker of English language.)

The sentence in example (20) contains an ambiguous word, *teacher,* which may refer to either a man or a woman. However, semantic context here is disambiguating, since only a female teacher would be able to have a baby.

4.2.3   The role of frequency

Frequency, that is to say, the frequency of individual possible meanings of ambiguous words occurring in text or speech, is yet another important (and often very helpful) factor of resolution. The fact is that not all meanings occur equally frequently, which lowers the probability of the less frequent ones being correct. As Kellas et al. point out: "… most homonyms are polarized, in which there is usually one frequently used (dominant) meanings, and one or more less frequently used (subordinate) meanings." (1998, 979) Of course, one cannot eliminate the possibility of the subordinate meanings entirely. The dominant meanings also arise in the perceiver's mind more quickly and in the first place.

4.3   Syntactic ambiguity resolution

Before we start dealing with syntactic disambiguation itself, let us attempt to clarify its relation to lexical ambiguity. The two cannot be thought of completely separately, since there are various kinds of them, many of which could be easily placed into both groups (see section 3.3). As Lawrence Birnbaum puts it, " ... lexical ambiguity is not just a problem for *semantic* analysis. It is also one of the chief causes of structural ambiguity, and it is, therefore, an issue with which syntactic analyzers must contend as well." (1985, 815)

Although in the past the dominating opinion was that lexical and syntactic ambiguity are resolved in completely different ways, the modern view favours the so-called *constraint-based lexicalist models of sentence comprehension* (Trueswell 1996, 566) which favour the view that syntactic ambiguity resolution depends to a great extent on semantic processing of a phrase/sentence. "Word-sense ambiguity

very often entails part-of-speech ambiguity as well. .... Syntactic analyzers cannot, therefore, be expected to solve by themselves the problem of lexical ambiguity, even just part-of-speech ambiguity. It is not unreasonable, however, to expect that they might contribute to its solution." (Birnbaum 1985, 816)

Therefore, the ways of resolving both major kinds of ambiguity are intertwined in many aspects. On the other hand, let us not forget that there are also differences between the ways of resolving lexical and syntactic ambiguity.

Most theories on syntactic ambiguity resolution favour a two-step procedure of first using syntactic knowledge to create one or more possible structure representations, and then choosing one while connecting it with additional (lexical or discourse) information. (MacDonald et al. 1994, 677) For instance, Frazier's garden path theory "… claims that the parser assigns a single immediate analysis to an ambiguous fragment of a temporarily or permanently ambiguous sentence. The analysis assigned is determined by very general parsing principles that appeal to the nature of the structure being built, not by nonstructural considerations such as meaning or plausibility." (Frazier & Clifton 1996, 8) Assumptions like that of course lead naturally to the question what factors are relevant in the process of resolving syntactic ambiguity.

4.3.1 The role of context

Context, especially grammatical, at first may seem irrelevant here. However, it is not without significance.

As MacDonald et al. claim, "… the use of contextual information should be limited to the second-stage reanalysis of incorrect parses." (1994, 680) Therefore, the

information that context provides only can be used after the two or more alternatives become activated.

Grammatical context only may become of use with phrases that are partially or temporarily ambiguous, such as:

Example (21): *The contestant prepared by his teacher won 500 dollars.*

The syntactic ambiguity which occurs at the beginning of this sentence is only temporary – it only remains until the perceiver notices and processes the ending.

When resolving such and similar ambiguities, what also may become helpful are the so-called *thematic roles:* "Information that is accessed when a word is recognized is used to define a set of syntactic and semantic possibilities (within a circumscribed domain), as well as to provide many of the constraints relevant to evaluating the possibilities." (Trueswell & Tanenhaus 1994, 156)

In terms of this aspect, MacDonald et al. mention the so-called *argument structures* which "… encode relationships between the word and the phrases that occur with it (the word's arguments) and capture important facts about correlations between syntactic and semantic information." (1994, 682) It means that not every kind of combination of, for example, objects, subjects or prepositional phrases is possible.

Example (22): *boiling soup*

Without any additional information, it can either mean soup that is in the process of boiling, or the activity of boiling the soup. However, mere adding of, for example, article *the* will clarify which option is the correct one – either *the boiling soup* (meaning the soup which is being boiled) or *boiling the soup* (the activity of boiling).

What usually helps resolve syntactic ambiguity, especially in case of pun, is *pragmatic context* and, as MacDonald et al. name it, *"plausibility"* (1994, 680), i.e. which option, in terms of the situation in which the ambiguity occurs, is most probably the correct interpretation.

This inscription appeared at the entrance of one of Moscow's cemeteries:

Example (23): "*You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian and Soviet composers, artists and writers are buried daily except Thursday.*" (Gray Area 2011)

Even if the translator to English made the sentence ambiguous, an average tourist would understand it correctly, since, of course, *daily* referring to visits being possible is the most plausible interpretation.

4.3.2   The role of frequency

The relevance of frequency was mostly underestimated in the past. As MacDonald et al. say, when a human mind is in the process of perceiving and,

subsequently, resolving an ambiguity, it has no access to the information about the statistics of individual possible interpretations. (682)

However, recent studies showed that such opinion is not entirely justified. Some of the interpretations of syntactic ambiguities are less frequent and therefore even less probable to be correct in particular cases than others. " ... the recognition of a word in context also includes the computation of information concerning the type of argument structures within which the word can appear. If this representation is ambiguous, multiple forms may be computed in parallel. The availability of the alternative forms of a word should be determined in part by relative frequency, with more frequent alternatives being computed more rapidly. Crucially, this predicts that the effectiveness of a syntactically relevant contextual constraint should depend upon the frequency of the lexical form it biases." (Trueswell 1996, 567)

Trueswell also points out that there are two types of frequency that are relevant in terms of syntactic ambiguity resolution – the frequency of individual phrases (or phrase structures) and the lexical frequency (see section 5.2.3.)

Note that the fact that lexical frequency works as a basis for syntactic ambiguity resolution as well again suggests that syntactic ambiguity in most cases cannot be dealt with separately from lexical ambiguity. (Trueswell 1996, 568)

5 TRANSLATING AMBIGUITY

The best ways of translating particular cases of ambiguities differ, depending on whether they are intentional or unintentional.

"It is common, in literary studies, to overestimate the extent to which texts are ambiguous, and hence to overstate the extent to which different readers (or one reader on different occasions) can vary in the way they make sense of the text. … Outside literature, in practice, ambiguities are rarely noticed in a text, and it is quite difficult to find examples when one is looking for them." (Leech 2008, 190)

When a translator stumbles upon a text in which an unintentional ambiguity (i.e. an ambiguity that arises without the author's realizing it) occurs, it is best if they are able to resolve and eliminate it in order for the translation to become clear.

Example (24): *Please do not feed the animals. If you have any suitable food, give it to the guard on duty.* (Gray Area, 2011)

Example (24) comes from a sign hanging at a zoo in Budapest. It is obvious that as non-native speakers, the authors of the sign were not aware of the ambiguity that arises within these two sentences. Having the intention to merely ask the visitors to give the food to the guard who would feed the animals for them, they made it sound as if they wanted the visitors to feed the guard instead. Fortunately, in cases like this, such ambiguities only end up being amusing, since they are not as confusing – there is hardly anyone who would not be able of resolving them correctly.

Unintentional ambiguities are not very frequent, but if they happen to arise, it is important to distinguish them from the intentional ones. Those ambiguities that

occur in the language of literature, films, sitcoms and similar forms of art are usually intended, since ambiguity in these cases usually have a certain purpose (such as being a source of pleasure) and it is highly desirable to preserve them in translation, if possible (which may become quite a difficult task). On the other hand, unintentional ambiguities rarely produce the amount of, for instance, humorous effect as the deliberate ones, since they usually occur by accident. Deliberate ambiguity is used very frequently in sitcoms as a basis for wordplay.

The root of the problems with pun translation streams from the unbalanced relationship between the language itself and the existence that it denotes (not every language in the world has words or terms for every object, activity or any part of existence). Furthermore, the number and diversity of languages around the world is so high that the degree of possibility of the same pun existing in two, or even more languages, is very small. There are, of course, cases in which the original pun can be preserved, but rarity of such cases is almost unimaginable. How then can (and should) translation deal with the problem – i.e. how can it preserve, if not the original wordplay, then at the very least its linguistic value in order not to rob the source text of the original text's richness?

The ideal case, of course, is when an ambiguity can be translated directly to another language. If this is the case, the process of resolving the ambiguity can be omitted and both the source text and the target text remain equally ambiguous. In most cases, however, ambiguities need to be translated otherwise.

One option is to translate the original joke directly and provide an explanation about whatever may cause its humorousness. (This process is not rare in translation of sitcoms, especially when a new episode comes out and the subtitles that are

available in almost no time on the Internet are frequently written by inexperienced translators). This, however, is not the best solution in spoken language, when there is not enough time for explanation. Moreover, this approach may cause the humorous part to lose its humour. "First, if a translation of the ST is to arouse in a TT reader an effect analogous to that aroused or potentially aroused in a ST leader, it will not be sufficient to inform the TT leader of the locution or illocution performed in the ST or to ‚explain the joke', for example, by presenting an analysis of the basis on which it is founded, such as an ambiguity or pun in the source language. In other words, no amount of exegesis is likely to bring about perlocutionary equivalence in this type of translation; on the contrary, attempts to explain a humorous text usually end up boring the leader and killing the humour." (Hickey 1998, 229)

Providing an explanation (a translational technique called *adaptation* or *amplification* (Fawcett 1997, 45)) is definitely not the ideal solution. That brings up the most widely used and perhaps also the most plausible approach – using a similar alternative that exists in the target language, or creating one. "A translator, therefore, is a rewriter who determines the implied meanings of the target language text, and who also, in the act of rewriting, redetermines the meaning of the original. …. Translation as radical rewriting can thus be seen as a way of rescuing the original from unwanted constraint." (Boase – Beier & Holman 1999, 14)

A lot has been written on particular techniques that are used to translate not only wordplay but many other problematic phenomena, but not all of them can be used in translation of ambiguity.

Equivalence, defined by Peter Fawcett as "… translation of idioms when two languages refer to the same situation in totally different ways" (1997, 38) may also work for some of the jokes whose effect is based on ambiguity (see the practical part for examples).

However, it is yet another option that only can be used rarely, considering how low the probability of its realization is.

Fawcett also mentions *compensation* as a possibly plausible technique, but warns that it may be problematic: "The term covers so many situations that there is a danger of seeing all translation as compensation act of overzealous to turning their task into one of comment or even total adaptation and rewriting." (1997, 31) Compensation (and, subsequently, adaptation) should therefore be used only when there is no other possibility.

Vinay & Darbelnet offer another technique, *modulation:* "… a variation of the form of the message, obtained by changing point of view." (1995, 51) This may become usable for syntactic ambiguities, as well as *reordering,* which is another option offered by Fawcett. Since there are cases which require rearranging or breaking up some of the sequences in order to make the translated text comprehensible, or simple because the two languages differ in terms of narrative and stylistic structures. (1997, 49) It also may work in translation of syntactic ambiguity cases.

Sadly, the most frequent approaches to translation of ambiguity in TV series and films appears to be direct translation (which causes omission of the amusing

part) or even omission of some of the original text itself – the translation is only accurate to a certain level, but in some cases, such solution is unavoidable.

Every individual case of ambiguity is special and requires different approach in translation. When speaking about those that are a basis for humour in films or TV series, or generally in spoken language, it has to be stressed that functionality of translation becomes more important than faithfulness to the original.

"It could be argued that such freedom is not consistent with the role of the translator as a faithful copier. Yet it is in principle no greater than that of any translator who takes on the right to interpret, nor indeed of any author who claims the right to present materials as he or she sees fit. In this view, the role of the translator has changed from that of a faithful reproducer to an inventive interventionist." (Boase – Beier, Holman 1999, 14)

Since the main aim is to amuse the audience and not to educate, the translator not only has to take into consideration the amount of time that is available, but also needs to advocate free creativity over accuracy.

6   AMBIGUITY IN *FRASIER* AND *THE BIG BANG THEORY*

Ambiguity in common everyday language is quite rare. Most people's aim is to make communication among them as comprehensible as possible, so intentional ambiguity in a common conversation is mostly attempted to avoid. It only occurs with a certain goal behind it, such as deception (see section 2). Unintentional ambiguity, as was already mentioned, although it occurs unconsciously, is quite rare as well. Ambiguity as a source of humour and wordplay, on the other hand, is very common – in literature as well as in film and on television. The existence of ambiguity, therefore, can be best observed in a fictional humorous text/discourse.

To demonstrate the occurrence of various kinds of ambiguity in fictional humorous discourse, two very successful American sitcoms were chosen – *Frasier* (originally broadcasted in 1993 – 2004, produced by David Angell, Peter Casey, and David Lee) and *The Big Bang Theory* (broadcasted since 2007, produced by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady). The *Frasier* series consists of eleven complete seasons and it is, therefore, quite older than *The Big Bang Theory,* which only has four so far. They each represent a different variety of characters, situations and backgrounds, but there is a feature they both have in common – in each of them, central characters are highly educated intellectuals. Considering the diversity of all these factors, the amount of the material (particularly in *Frasier*) and the fact that ambiguity-based wordplay is a very popular source of humour in sitcoms, all possible kinds of ambiguities may be expected to appear.

Examples of individual cases of various kinds of ambiguity from both series are presented, commented and analyzed here, along with their translations into Czech language, as dubbed and broadcasted by TV Prima and TV Prima Cool in Czech Repulic, *Frasier* translated by Šárka Bartesová, Dana Krejčová, Petra Matějková and

Dušan Glombíček, *The Big Bang Theory* translated by František Maxián, Petr Finkous, and Lucie Ďásková (Dabing Forum, 2011)). If we take into consideration that TV Prima broadcasted individual episodes of both series in quite short periods of time, much elaborated translations probably cannot be expected, especially in terms of wordplay (whose translation may take a long time, if it is supposed to be successful). Besides being pressed for time, the translators also have to consider dubbing – the length of their translation cannot become much longer or much shorter than the original. All in all, such conditions for translation suggest that in most cases the humorous effect will be lost, leaving only the informative value of the originally humorous statements.

The Big Bang Theory involves characters most of whom are physicists – although they are geniuses, they may be a little awkward in terms of human relationships. The persona of interest is Dr Sheldon Cooper – he has a beautiful mind, but at the same time lacks normal human urges, needs or feelings completely. His genius, combined with his tendency to patronize his less intelligent friends, may become very obnoxious from time to time. The ambiguity humour in the series is mostly based on Sheldon's not being able to recognize sarcasm or to understand common human desires and problems, which he tends to confront and resolve in his robotic, scientific way. (That is why often there are sentences or words that are not ambiguous at first, but their ambiguity gets revealed when Sheldon either points them out or fails to comprehend them.) Therefore, the task of recognizing the ambiguity by the spectators, and sometimes even the process of resolution often becomes absent.

Humour in *Frasier* series, however, is of a more elevated kind – if there is a pun or a joke based on ambiguity, one has to be able to recognize it. The central characters are Dr Frasier Crane and Dr Niles Crane, two psychiatrist brothers who are very well educated, extremely intelligent, but on the other hand, more or less technologically challenged and also a little awkward when it comes to their romantic relationships with women. Their tendency to being ellitist towards everyday people is what the sitcom has in common with *The Big Bang Theory*'s Sheldon's condescension, and it shows especially in contrast with their father Martin Crane, a former policeman. The *Frasier* show is remarkably linguistically rich, its episodes contain all kinds of wordplay, most of them based on ambiguity of various kinds.

Generally, in texts such as are analyzed here, ambiguity is seldom resolved otherwise than by the help of context. Cases when a joke's effect is actually based on an ambiguity being impossible to resolve (i.e. both, or even more meanings remain possible) at all are also not rare. Since they are aimed at a large audience, their recognition is hardly very problematic – even the most elaborate jokes are usually recognized by contrast (see section 4.1).

6.1   Lexical ambiguity in *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*

Lexical ambiguity is much more frequent in both shows than syntactic ambiguity. Wordplay based on individual word's various meanings can be found in almost any of the episodes of both sitcoms – examples of all subtypes including polysemes, homophones, and homonyms. Let us begin by taking a look at the cases of polysemy.

6.1.1 Polysemes

Many of the jokes and puns are based on polysemy, which (along with homonymy) is probably the most frequent source of ambiguity in (not only) in these two shows.

One of the typical examples can be found in the episode of *The Big Bang Theory* where Leonard breaks up with a fellow scientist, Dr Lesley Winkle, one of the reasons being his infatuation with his friend Penny. Leonard becomes very puzzled when Penny puckishly remarks that it is a shame, since Leonard and Lesley could have been great together:

"Leonard: What did Penny mean, you'd make a cute couple?
Sheldon: Well I assume she meant that the two of you would constitute a couple that others might consider cute. An alternate, and somewhat less likely interpretation, is that you could manufacture one. As in, oh look, Leonard and Lesley made Mr and Mrs Goldfarb, aren't they adorable?" (S01E05 – The Hamburger Postulate)

As we will see further on, it is common in many cases of ambiguity in The Big Bang Theory for the humour to lie not in the meaning being unclear, but rather in providing an alternative as a reaction to a clear question and thus pointing out the ambiguity that normally would not have been even noticed. The word *make*, unambiguous under usual circumstances (since there is enough context) becomes semantically ambiguous and problematic in translation. The moment when Sheldon points it out is the moment of not only the recognition of the ambiguity, but at the same time the moment of its origin AND activation of possible meanings. Sheldon

even lays out the possible interpretations and thus the ambiguity arises in the spectators'minds already pre-resolved.

Czech translation:

"Leonard: Proč řekla „Byl by z vás krásnej pár"?

Sheldon: Penny to asi myslela tak, že by to byl pár, který by ostatní měli za krásný. Anebo, což je méně pravděpodobné, ti začala vykat a chce tě rozpůlit. Už ji slyším: „Rozsekla jsem Leonarda vejpůl. Není k sežrání?" (S01E05 – Hamburgerový postulát)

The Czech translation preserves the humour of the original by avoiding to use the polysemous word *make* and simply stating the possible result („Byl by z vás krásnej pár"), which becomes ambiguous in a similar way as the original. It is probably the best possible solution, although the following lines are not entirely as amusing as in the original, since it contains much more absurd possibilities.

Considering Sheldon's reaction, in his eyes it is, in fact, the question posed by Leonard that is ambiguous.

Let us take a look at an example of semantic ambiguity in *Frasier* from an episode where Frasier's brother Niles and his wife Daphne organize dinner and invite everyone to their place, but their oven unexpectedly gets broken, so they bring all the food to Frasier's to prepare it there:

"Niles: My Gaggenau is German-engineered. It probably needs more power than my old building's wiring can give it.

Martin: Leave it to the Germans – even their appliances crave power." (S11E02 – A Man, a Plan and a Gal Julia)

The humorousness is based on the polyseme *power,* its first meaning being energy that operates the oven, the second meaning being authority or physical strength. This time the joke is created intentionally, because Martin of course is aware of the two meanings and deliberately uses the word in the meaning of authority. Just to prove the ambiguity of the word, let us use John Saeed's sense relation test (see section 4.1):

Germans proved their power.
Germans proved their mightiness.
*Germans proved their electricity.

The building was remote, but it still had power.
The building was remote, but it still had electricity.
*The building was remote, but it still had mightiness.

In this part of the episode, Niles is talking about the electricity of the building, but Martin's response activates the second meaning of *power,* so in fact the process of selective access is followed by the process of multiple access (see section 5.2.2). Since Niles brings food and explains the problems he had with his oven, it creates a context that is disambiguating, which in fact provides basis for Martin's joke.

Czech translation is questionable:

"Niles: Je jen trochu nevypočitatelná. Vyrobili ji totiž v Německu. Nejspíš potřebuje větší příkon než dovolují ty staré rozvody u mně doma.

Martin: To jsou celí Němci – ještěže nevyhlásili válku myčce." (S11E02 – Kdo chce zabít Julii)

Niles uses the word *příkon* in his part of the dialogue, but subsequently, of course, Martin can use neither a word like *elektřina,* nor a word like *moc* in his (not only for the sake of the joke). The structure of the dialogue makes it problematic to even translate it at all. Czech translation again could have done better – perhaps by omitting the word power entirely and using a word that denotes some kind of quality that would apply to both Germans and their electric appliances. For example:

Martin: To jsou celí Němci – dokonce i jejich spotřebiče jsou nenasytné.

Another sample from *The Big Bang Theory* comes from an episode where Leonard's mother comes for a visit. Leonard comes from a family of intellectuals of a high rank – his mother is a renowned psychiatrist and neurologist and, incidentally, she is just as insufferable as Sheldon. When Leonard makes her tea, she has a number of requests and he never manages to get it right. Eventually, Sheldon offers to make it tea for her:

"Sheldon: Can I make you a cup of tea?
Beverly Hofstadter: I doubt it, but if anyone has a chance, it's probably you."
(S02E15 – Maternal Capacitance)

Dr Beverly Hofstadter takes over the role that usually belongs to Sheldon – she makes a sentence that is unambiguous at first (or there is enough disambiguating context) and points out the ambiguity that otherwise would be unnoticed. While Sheldon uses the word *can* to express politeness (in fact he is asking for permission to make tea for her), she takes it as a mere informative question about his ability (ambiguity again proved by contrast).

Czech translation once again leaves out one of the possible interpretations and thus fails to preserve the humorousness:

"Zvládnu vám udělat šálek čaje?

Beverly Hofstadter: Pochybuji, ale jestli má někdo šanci, tak asi vy." (S02E15 – Mateřská kapacita)

In Czech, Sheldon is not being polite, but comes right to the point which Dr Hofstadter was supposed to make. The translation attempts to keep Dr Hofstadter's response intact, which resulted in using the word *zvládnout* in Sheldon's question, which is not the best solution. It would probably be wiser to let Sheldon say what he really meant and modify her answer:

Sheldon: Můžu vám udělat šálek čaje?

Beverly Hofstadter: To můžete, ale pochybuju, že to zvládnete.

6.1.2 Homonyms

The problems with translating homonyms are similar as with polysemes, however, the problems with homonyms may be even more frequent. Any relation

among the individual meanings is absent, so even the probability of finding a suitable equivalent in another language decreases.

Let us illustrate on an example from *Frasier,* where a joke is made using the word *shrink* as wordplay on the two meanings (*shrink* as a verb, meaning to draw back from something, and *shrink* as a noun, a slang term for a psychiatrist), when Dr Frasier Crane is being interviewed for a television job. There is an audition and he is given several seconds to introduce himself.

"Frasier: Before we begin, I'd like to say how honoured I am to be taking over this slot. Obviously, I have some rather big shoes to fill - my predecessor here was much beloved. But I have never been one to shrink from a challenge." (S06E01 – Good Grief)

There may be doubt about whether the word is ambiguous here at all. Considering the structure of the sentence and the fact that the word *shrink* in the sense of a psychiatrist is a noun, not a verb, the grammatical context here definitely rules out the possibility of its being applied. The fact that it is a wordplay based on ambiguity only arises when Frasier gives special phonetic emphasis to the word *shrink* - he utters it in order to draw attention to the fact that this word may have another meaning. It may even be considered a kind of a zeugma. Subsequently, when trying to resolve the ambiguity, one realizes that only one option is possible, since Frasier used the word as a verb, therefore, the grammatical context here is disambiguating.

To preserve the original ambiguity is, of course, not possible, however, the Czech translation still could have done a lot better:

"Frasier: Než začneme, rád bych řekl, že je mi ctí, že přebírám tento pořad. Je mi jasné, že to nebudu mít vůbec snadné, můj předchůdce byl velice oblíbený. Ale já jsem se nikdy v životě nezalekl jakékoli změny[*]." (S06E01 – Nezaměstnaný)

Although the Czech version keeps the informative value of Frasier's statement, there could have been at least partial attempt to add some humorous value to it, as in the previous example from *The Big Bang Theory* – for instance by using some slang word in Czech (such as *cvokař* or *zcvoknout se):*

Snad se z nějaké výzvy hned nezcvoknu.

Another example of a homonymy joke from *The Big Bang Theory* occurs in the episode where, upon hearing a sound of a cricket in the building, Sheldon and Howard quarrel about what exact species of cricket it is – Sheldon claims it is a snowy tree cricket, Howard roots for an ordinary field cricket. They make a wager and eventually, when they find the cricket, an entomologist at the university declares that it is a field cricket and Sheldon loses.

"Penny: What do you have a safe deposit box for?
Sheldon: Old comic books. I lost this to Wolowitz in an ill-considered cricket wager.
Penny: What, do they have Wii cricket now? That can't be very popular." (S03E02 – The Jiminy Conjecture)

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[*] *Notice the mistake in the translation: replacing **challenge** by **change***

Homonyms *cricket,* a type of chirping insect, and *cricket,* a kind of a game that involves hitting a ball through sticks, creates a basis for this joke. Its effect is strengthened by the fact that Sheldon never shows any interest in nature, so naturally, *cricket* in the meaning of the game comes to Penny's mind first. That is also the moment when the second meaning becomes activated and the structure of the dialogue proves the existence of ambiguity by contrast. Context (formed by the preceding happenings) enables resolution of the ambiguity. Czech translation in this case is quite witty:

"Penny: Na co máš bezpečnostní schránku?

Sheldon: Na tyhle staré komiksy. Prohrál jsem s Wolowitzem v neuvážené sázce na cvrčka.

Penny: Na Nintendo jsou i hry se hmyzem? Kdo to tak může hrát?" (S03E02 – Spor o cvrčka)

Again, it is impossible to use the same exact joke, so the translators used one of the meanings only (*cvrček*) and let Penny make an assumption that what Sheldon has in mind is some kind of a game that involves insects.

From the examples that have been stated so far it may appear that translation of *The Big Bang Theory* has been much more successful than in *Frasier.* Let us, however, take a look at another ambiguity joke from *Frasier* to demonstrate that Czech translation here is quite good at some points. It occurs in the episode where Frasier's ex-wife Lilith comes to visit and congratulates his brother Niles and his wife Daphne on her pregnancy:

"Lilith: Daphne, Niles, congratulations on the successful comingling of your genetic material.

Daphne: Thank you.

Lilith: Do you know the sex?

Niles: Do we? That's how we got pregnant!" (S11E09 – Guns n' Neuroses)

It may be one of the most appreciated verbal jokes in *Frasier,* since it creates an exceedingly embarrassing situation – Niles misinterprets Lilith's innocent question about the sex of their unborn baby as an impertinent inquiry (it has to be mentioned here that Niles is a very timid, shy character who was never successful with women ever since his adolescence, so he has been overcompensating this handicap in the adult years of his life). Again, the same procedures of activation of the second meaning, recognition by contrast and resolution by context follow one by one during the dialogue.

Although Czech translation does not maintain the same ambiguity, it provides a similar one:

"Lilith: Daphne, Nilesi, gratuluju k úspěšnému smíchání vašeho genetického materiálu.

Daphne: Děkujeme.

Lilith: A co pohlaví?

Niles: Funkční, jinak bychom neotěhotněli." (S11E09 – Vůně růží a střelného prachu)

Before proceeding to homophones, let us state an example of almost ideal conditions – a case of ambiguity being translatable (if not directly, then at least

without any problems) by using the technique of equivalence, a situation which is very scarcely seen in any pair of languages. It comes from and episode where Frasier is nominated for a broadcast award and is desperately looking for a date to accompany him on during the ceremony. He almost gets lucky with a a lady who lives next door to him, but she declines when she finds out that the ceremony takes place on Saturday morning instead of Saturday evening.

"Roz: Oh, you can't blame her, Frasier. Who wants to get in hair and makeup at eight in the morning?

Frasier: Well, somebody better. I'm being profiled, it's going to look like I can't even scare up a date.

Roz: You scared that one pretty good." (S11E10 – Sea Bee Jeebies)

This particular case may fit better into the category of ambiguities that are on the borderline of lexical and syntactic, but it is still based on a homonymic relationship between the verbs *to scare* and *to scare up*. It illustrates a situation where there is no need to go to extreme measures to translate a joke plausibly:

"Roz: Nevyčítej jí to, Frasiere. Která by se chtěla malovat a vyčesávat na osmou ráno?

Frasier: Nějaká bude muset. Budu mít interview a vypadalo by to, že nedokážu splašit doprovod.

Roz: Tuhle jsi vyplašil dokonale." (S11E10 - A cenu CB získává...)

Luckily, there is a similar relationship in Czech words *splašit* and *vyplašit* having practically the same meanings as their equivalents in English.

6.1.3 Homophones

Homophones are one of the most frequent causes of ambiguity in fictional discourse, since it lies in their audible form. A common spectator also will appreciate them more than other kinds of ambiguity, because the moment of their recognition involves realizing the conflict between the written form and the spoken form. That even strenghthens the momentary humorous effect, which, apparently, is more important in performed dialogues than complicated wordplay.

Let us take a look at an example from *The Big Bang Theory* episode where Sheldon makes up a joke based on ambiguity and subsequently, since Penny does not seem to find it amusing, even explains it:

"Sheldon: Secret keeping is a complicated endeavour. One has to be concerned not only about what one says, but about facial expression, autonomic reflexes, when I try to deceive, I myself have more nervous tics than a lyme disease research facility. (Long pause.) It's a joke. It relies on the homonymic relationship between tick the blood-sucking arachnid, and tic the involuntary muscular contraction. I made it up myself." (S02E01 – The Bad Fish Paradigm)

Since Sheldon explains the joke, the task of recognition and resolution no longer needs to be completed by the spectator. Note also that Sheldon uses the term

homonymy instead of *homophony* in his line. The translation here is built on a similar relationship that exists in Czech language:

"Sheldon: Udržení tajemství, to je složitý proces. Člověk si musí dávat pozor nejen na to, co říká, ale i hlídat si výraz a autonomní reflexi. Když se třeba já snažím lhát, mám při tom větší tiky než celý zkušební ústav mechaniky. To byl vtip, víš? Postavený na homonymu "tik", což je citoslovce hodin, a "tik", jako nedobrovolná svalová kontrakce. Vymyslel jsem ho sám." (S02E01 – Paradigma zkažené ryby)

Czech version takes advantage of the fact that the word *tik* (in the meaning of muscular contraction) exists in Czech language, and uses its homonym (in the meaning of the clock interjection) as a substitute for the original *tick* (the arachnid). Under other circumstances, the joke would lose its humorousness in such a process. However, as in many jokes of *The Big Bang Theory,* the humorous effect does not lie in the joke that Sheldon made up (and which neither Penny, nor the spectators find amusing), but in the fact (and in the way) that he explains it.

Surprisingly, *Frasier* does not contain as many cases of homophony as one would expect. Most of its ambiguity is based on homonymy or polysemy. Let us take a look at the case of homophony that occurred in an episode where Frasier talks to his producer Rozalinda about wishing to meet Miss Right. Later in a restaurant, while on a date with another woman, he is introduced to his boss' cousin whom he likes from the very first moment. Moreover, ironically, her last name is Wright.

"Frasier: It's lovely to meet you… miss Wright." (S11E05 – The Placeholder)

The ambiguity based on the homophones *right* and *Wright* would not have arisen here at all without the previous context (at the beginning of the episode, Frasier explains to Roz, who is worried about him being lonely, why is he not dating anyone at the moment. He tries to explain that he does not want to go out with somebody that he is not attracted to and that he would rather wait for Miss Right) – so ironically, what enables the creation of the pun, also enables its resolution. However, Czech translation is unsuccessful at trying to preserve this joke.

"Frasier: Moc rád vás poznávám, slečno Wrightová." (S11E05 – Nezávazná známost)

The translators simply omit the joke and directly translate the surname of the lady. (It may be interesting to find out that the Slovak version of this sitcom used a different approach – *Miss Wright* is translated to Slovak as *Slečna Správna,* which may be a very rare surname, but nevertheless it is not impossible, and it makes it possible for the joke to remain in the dialogue.)

One of the most unique cases of homophony can be found in the episode of *The Big Bang Theory* where Sheldon is trying to demonstrate to Penny how fluent he is in online chat terminology, which turns against him in the end:

"Penny: What's AFK?

Sheldon: AFK. Away from keyboard.

Penny: Oh, I see.

Sheldon: What does that stand for?

Penny: Oh, I see?

Sheldon: Yes, but what does it stand for?" (S02E03 – The Barbarian Sublimation)

Penny's line „*Oh, I see*" is phonetically the same as the supposed acronym OIC, which immediately comes to Sheldon's mind as a natural consequence of his explanation of the previous acronym AFK. As usual, it is an ambiguity that he creates for himself, although there are no two distinct meanings in reality. This time the ambiguity only exists in Sheldon's mind as long as he considers OIC an actual acronym with a meaning. This is also one of the lucky cases of ambiguity that can be very well translated into Czech:

"Penny: Co je NUK?

Sheldon: NUK. Nejsem u klávesnice.

Penny: O, aha.

Sheldon: Co je tohle za zkratku?

Penny: O, aha?

Sheldon: Ano, ale co to znamená?" (S01E03 – Barbarská sublimace)

The Czech translation uses equivalence. It is simple enough to create an acronym in Czech (*NUK – Nejsem u klávesnice*), while there is a good equivalent for *Oh, I see*: *O, aha,* which could be easily mistaken for the letters OAH.

The Big Bang Theory includes more cases of ambiguity based on homophony than *Frasier*. Homophones in *Frasier* usually appear in written form, as inscriptions between individual scenes. (I am mentioning these because most of them are very elaborate and interesting puns, often with at least some degree of intertextuality,

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despite the fact that once written down, homophones lose their ambiguous character – i.e. writing them down disambiguates them.) Although it may seem counterproductive at first, the overall impact is only underlined by the graphic demonstration of the wordplay. Usually, one of the meanings refers to something generally well-known, while the other one to something that happens in the episode.

For example, in one of the episodes Daphne, who is Martin's physical therapist, invites her Korean friend Pam over. Martin is quite smitten by her, since she reminds him of the girls from the wartime that he spent in Korea. The scene is opened by the subtitle „Seoul Mates" (S06E08 – The Seal Who Came To Dinner), which works as an introduction for Pam as a Korean, and at the same time may refer to either the friendship between her and Daphne or Martin and his soldier friends from Korea.

The Czech translation is *Korejská přátelství* (S06E08 – Zlatá zástěra)*,* which suggests that it is related to Martin rather than Daphne.

Another example, although it does not entirely fit the category of homophones, is the subtitle „Freudian Sleep" (S11E14), which is also a title of the episode where everybody has nightmares displaying their deepest secret fears. „Freudian Sleep" refers to these dreams (Niles and Frasier as psychiatrists usually have a tendency to analyze each other) as well as to another term from psychiatry, the *Freudian slip,* or *parapraxis:* "... a compromise formation between an action's conscious intention and the simultaneous partial realization of an unconscious wish" (Merlino 2008, 42). In layman's terms, this phenomenon is usually called a slip of the tongue. The Czech translation, *Freudovské sny* (S11E14)*,* omits the slip of the tongue, but works quite well in this case just by including Freud's name.

However, *Freudian slip* and *Freudian Sleep* should probably be categorized as an exceptional case of **paronymy,** "... words or word groups are nearly but not quite identical in spelling and pronounciation." (Delabastita 1993, 80)

The Big Bang Theory also includes a case of homophony that is almost impossible to translate. It occurs in an episode where Sheldon has a conflict with Penny which they cannot resolve, so it ends up in a big fight. From that moment on, they both start doing various malicious things to each other:

"Sheldon: Woman, you are playing with forces beyond your can.

Penny: Yeah, well, your Ken can kiss my Barbie." (S02E07 – The Panty Pinata Polarization)

This time it is Penny who misunderstands (supposedly) what Sheldon means (or, the more likely option is that it is just her way of rebuttal). *Can* as a noun in the meaning of ability has the same phonetic form as Ken, the male equivalent of a Barbie doll. The ambiguity arises on Penny's side of the dialogue for a change. Again, ambiguity is proved by contrast (*can* versus *Ken*), and resolved by context. The Czech version once again gave up on preserving the ambiguity:

"Sheldon: Dámo, tady si nebezpečně zahráváš s ohněm.

Penny: Ale pokud vím, spálila jsem tvý prsty." (S02E07 – Polarizace kalhotkové všehochuti)

The translators decided to use equivalence and an expression that is typical in Czech language – *zahrávat si s ohněm.* The dialogue lost most of its humorousness that way, but the informative value at least remains intact.

Let us also have a look at another example from *Frasier* that comes from an episode where Niles is starting to despair over his dating situation – his fresh ex-wife Maris is dating various wealthy men, but he on the other hand cannot even scare up enough courage to talk to a woman. He is complaining about it to his father in a living room while Daphne waits on them. Martin is trying to encourage Niles and give him some useful advice, but he still finds his situation very disapponting:

"Daphne: Wine, Dr. Crane?

Niles: Well, wouldn't you?"(S03E13 – Moon Dance)

Niles' mistake clearly stems from his fixation on his own problems and when Daphne offers him wine, he thinks she said *whine* and automatically takes it as a comment on his constant complaining. Again, the spectators only recognize the ambiguity here in the same moment it gets resolved (by context).

Czech translation, just like in most cases, simply leaves out the joke:

"Daphne: Víno, doktore Crane?

Niles: Ooooh, teď přemýšlím!" (S03E13 – Smím prosit, Daphne?)

Of course, this is a very difficult dialogue to translate if the humorous effect is to be preserved, since there is no similar relationship between these two words in Czech. However, the translators still could do better – if not in preserving the very amount of original humorous effect, then in reaching at least some amount, by preserving the contrast between Daphne's friendly offer and Niles' morose answer, such as:

Daphne: Můžu vám nabídnout, doktore Crane?

Niles: Možná tak oprátku na krk!

6.2   Syntactic ambiguity in *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*

(Pure) syntactic ambiguity is much less frequent in both series than lexical ambiguity. In fact, its occurrence there is almost nonexistent. Let us present the very only pure syntactic ambiguity joke that can be found in *The Big Bang Theory*. It occurs in the episode where Howard Wolowitz, an engineer who constructs toilets for NASA spaceships and a man who is considered quite unattractive by most women, finally comes up with the right pickup line that is supposed to help him woo a girl. He takes Stephanie to Mars Rover control room, hoping his charm will work on her, but in the end she chooses his friend Leonard instead.

"Leonard: Just out of curiosity, did he ever have a shot with you?

Stephanie: Are you insane? The guy was wearing an eye-patch.

Leonard: Then why did you?

Stephanie: He said that I could drive a car on Mars." (S02E08 – The Lizard Spock Expansion)

The ambiguity here could probably even called strategic. Wolowitz was deliberately ambiguous in order to make his statement sound as if he was going to take Stephanie to Mars, while the only thing that he could do was let her drive the Mars Rover from its control room on Earth.

Of course, the ambiguity is resolved by the help of pragmatic context (see section 5.3.1) – the more plausible solution is the correct one. The factor of frequency is also not without significance here.

Czech version of this dialogue:

"Leonard: Poslyš, čistě ze zvědavosti, měl by u tebe vůbec šanci?

Stephanie: Zbláznil ses? Vždyť měl pásku přes oko.

Leonard: Tak proč si s ním...?

Stephanie: Říkal, že můžu řídit vozítko na Marsu." (S02E08 – Rozšíření o tapír Spock)

Fortunately, direct translation into Czech language was possible here – the meaning remains the same and thus Wolowitz' strategy is preserved.

Surprisingly, there are no cases of pure syntactic ambiguity in *Frasier*. Most cases of ambiguity that involve syntax are those that are on the border of lexical and syntactic ambiguity, or lexico – syntactic ambiguity, as named by Cruse (see section 3.3), which brings up the next section.

6.3   Borderline ambiguity in *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*

Both series include many jokes based on lexico-syntactic ambiguity. Lexico-syntactic ambiguity could be defined as ambiguity that involves elements of both lexical and syntactic ambiguity, and, at the same time, cannot be placed definitely into any of the two categories. Some jokes even contain elements of the referential ambiguity and are on the border with lexical ambiguity. Many of the ambiguity based jokes in both series fall under these descriptions.

Let us have a look at a sample from an episode where Frasier's ex-wife Lilith is trying to seduce him by wearing a very attractive dress:

"Lilith: I treated myself to a little shopping this afternoon. Probably just a pathetic attempt to compensate for the battering my ego's taken recently. It's pretty transparent, huh?

Frasier: No, but if you stand in the light, maybe…" (S05E15 – Room Service)

Frasier, unable to think about anything but Lilith's sexy dress, fails to realize that she is talking about the transparency of her behaviour (Lilith is a psychiatrist as well). His response helps activate two possible meanings (multiple access), which, in the overall result, makes their conversation amusing. The word *transparent* definitely is polysemous, which provides an opportunity to interpret it literally, and in an abstract way as well. However, it is not just this case of polysemy that accounts for the ambiguity here – in fact, it is Lilith's entire last sentence which is ambiguous. The pronoun *it* in "It's pretty transparent, huh?" may refer to both the dress or her behaviour, which also is one of the causes of Frasier's misunderstanding. In short,

this particular joke is based on ambiguity that is partly lexical and partly referential (see section 3.3).

Czech translation:

"Lilith: Odpoledne jsem se prošla a trochu nakupovala. Nejspíš to byl jen žalostný pokus kompenzovat si nějak to nedávno potlučené ego. Je to dost průsvitné, co?

Frasier: Když se postavíš do světla, možná... " (S05E15 – Hotelová služba)

Luckily, this is one of those cases of ambiguity jokes that can be translated directly into Czech, which the translators did, too. The ambiguous *it* from the original also remains ambiguous in Czech. On the other hand, the word „průsvitné" used in Czech translation only fits the dress, but is usually not used when talking about transparent behaviour. Therefore I would suggest the word „průhledné" instead od „průsvitné", which is often used to describe fabric as well as behaviour.

Another good example of a borderline ambiguity joke from *The Big Bang Theory* appears in the episode where Sheldon and Rajesh are playing a rather weird game in a restaurant where Penny works as a waitress:

"Penny: Hey, guys, guys, some of the other waitresses wanted me to ask you something.

Leonard: Oh, it's called trestling.

Howard: It combines the physical strength of arm wrestling with the mental agility of tetris into the ultimate sport.

Penny: Yeah, that's terrific, but what they wanted me to ask you was to cut it the hell out." (S01E16 – The Peanut Reaction)

This is one of the less frequent cases of an ambiguity joke in *The Big Bang Theory* which is created by a character who is not a scientist – Penny. The polysemy of the word *ask* is recognized when it is used in two different ways (see section 4.1 for Murphy's test of contrast). As is typical for *The Big Bang Theory,* the ambiguity arises, becomes recognized and resolved (by context), all at the same moment.

Again, the Czech translation copes very well with the conflict between asking out of interest and asking somebody to do something by simply using one of them only:

"Penny: Kluci, kluci, moje kolegyně by strašně zajímala jedna věc.

Leonard: Jo, říká se tomu táka.

Howard: Zcela dokonalý sport, v němž se snoubí sílu prověřující páka a postřeh prověřující tetris.

Penny: Jo, to je hezký, ale je by spíš zajímalo, kdy s tím dáte pokoj." (S01E16 – Reakce na arašídy)

In Czech, Penny uses the word *ask* in the meaning of inquiring (*zajímat(se)*) which gives her an opportunity to express the other meaning of *ask* as a polite inquiry instead of directly asking the boys to do something (which would be the literal translation) Note that in Czech version, the illocutionary force of the last sentence is different, which corresponds to what Hickey says about a successful translation – to merely explain the joke would, of course, not have the desired effect (see section 6).

Frasier offers a little bit more elaborated joke in the episode where Niles is enthusiastically reciting a poem by Robert Burns to his wife Daphne, expecting her to be stunned by it, but she is not very thrilled:

"Niles: Moving, aye?

Daphne: Yes. But not just because of the poem. I'm late for a hair appointment."
(S11E02 – A Man, a Plan and a Gal Julia)

While Niles is asking about the impression that the poem made on her, Daphne mistakes it for a question whether she is leaving already. Again, it is the response in the dialogue (this time by Daphne) that gives an opportunity to recognize the word *moving* as ambiguous. Note that for the ambiguity to be created, ellipsis had to be used (Niles omits all the other words which makes it possible for Daphne to interpret it as "You're moving, aye?", while he meant "It's moving, aye?").The ambiguity here remains unresolved by the characters (since they each understood it in their own way); however, context provides enough information for the spectator to realize what particular meanings they both had in mind.

Such a conversation is not easy to translate, although similar relationship exists in Czech (*citové pohnutí* and *pohyb*). Czech translation therefore completely leaves out this particular joke.

"Niles: To jde, ne?

Daphne: Jo. Jsem objednaná ke kadeřnici a už mám zpoždění." (S11E02 – Kdo chce zabít Julii)

It is definitely a shame that the translators did not offer a better solution. Although the direct translation here could hardly be realized, a technique such as equivalence or reformulation could produce better results. The Czech translation could have used a sentence that may, under various circumstances, express both positive and negative emotions, such as, for example, crying:

Niles: K pláči, viď?
Daphne: To teda ano.

To preserve the humorous effect, Daphne's response in such a case would, of course, have to become ironic.

One could argue, of course, that this solution is not suitable due to the length of the original, so there would be a problem with dubbing it. What could help is adding something neutral to Daphne's line (i.e. something that would not change the overall meaning), such as:

Niles: K pláči, viď?
Daphne: To teda ano. Já už mám na krajíčku. Jsem objednaná ke kadeřnici a už mám zpoždění.

Note that a much better solution was chosen in a very similar case that comes from an episode where Niles, while visiting Frasier, accidentally breaks one of his overpriced African fertility statues. In order to hide it from Frasier, he holds his hand on it so that the head would not fall off. Frasier happens to interprets it the wrong way and take it as a compliment:

"Frasier: Oh, Niles, have you changed your mind about my new statue? Yesterday you said it was sterile and unmoving.

Niles: Oh, it's moving now." (S11E09 - Guns n' Neuroses)

It is practically the same situation as in the previous example - the word *move* in two possible interpretations, either in the meaning of motion or in the meaning of emotional response. Only this time there is no ellipsis and both brothers are referring to the same thing – the statue. Surprisingly, the translation to Czech is much better than in the previous case:

"Frasier: Nilesi, snad jsi nezměnil na tu sochu názor? Ještě včera jsi říkal, že je strnulá a bez života.

Niles: Teď je živá až-až." (S11E09 - Vůně růží a střelného prachu)

By using equivalence, the translators were able to come up with an alternative – instead of using the word *move,* they used the word *život,* which provides an opportunity to create a similar relationship.

The Big Bang Theory offers another example in an episode where Sheldon is engrossed in an educational tape in Mandarin, completely ignoring the world around him, when suddenly Penny disturbs and frightens him:

"Sheldon (jumping in panic): Aieee ya! Xia si wo le.

Penny: I'm sorry. Look, do you have a second?

Sheldon: A second what? Pair of underwear?" (S01E17 – The Tangerine Factor)

This is one of the most elaborated jokes in *The Big Bang Theory*. Note that again, instead of realizing what Penny actually means, Sheldon creates an ambiguity that otherwise would not have occurred or be noticed. The homonym *second* is used in two completely different ways (ambiguity proved by contrast), first as a noun and then as a numeral. Again, for the activation of the second meaning, the ellipsis was necessary. Activation takes place in the moment when Sheldon comes up with the second one meaning. Unfortunately, it appears impossible to preserve this joke in translation to Czech:

"Sheldon: Aieee ya! Xia si wo le.

Penny: Promiň. Poslyš, měl bys chvilku?

Sheldon: Chvilku na co? Převlíknout si prádlo?" (S01E17 – Mandarinkový faktor)

Czech translation keeps at least a part of the joke by not changing the informative value. That is why the dialogue remains at least partly funny.

Another sample from *Frasier* includes two cases that are on the border of lexical and referential ambiguity, that is why the entire conversation is presented here. It comes from an episode where everyone is invited to Lilith's for a Thanksgiving dinner. Lilith, Frasier's ex-wife and an exceptionally cold, professional psychiatrist, is cooking dinner for the family, but since she has some unexpected urgent business, she asks Niles to finish making the turkey.

"Lilith: So, I'm enlisting you to help with the turkey.

Niles: Oh, well I've never cooked a turkey before, but the recipe's here, I guess I can fumble my way through. How far along are you?

Lilith: I'm nearly done defrosting.

Niles: And the turkey?

Lilith: Might I suggest you stuff it?" (S04E07 – A Lilith Thanksgiving)

When Niles asks about the status of the turkey, Lilith answers in a way that becomes referentially ambiguous with his next response. While she is simply referring to the turkey, he is insinuating that she may have been talking about herself, referring to her own unbelievable coldness (for which she is notorious). Resolution, of course, is unecessary, since Niles, just like everybody else, is aware of the correct interpretation, but reacts the way he does for the sake of the joke.

Another ambiguity is involved in the sentence "Might I suggest you stuff it?" – *stuff it* in the meaning of putting the appropriate ingredients inside the bird before putting it into the oven, and *stuff it* as a fixed phrase in the meaning of an interjection of contempt. The *it* therefore is definitely a case of referential ambiguity.

Czech translation was not able to preserve any of the jokes here.

"Lilith: Takže dodělej toho krocana, prosím tě.

Niles: No, krocana jsem nikdy nedělal, ale tady je recept, snad si s tím nějak poradím. Jak daleko jsi došla?

Lilith: Skoro až k rozmrazování[*].

Niles: A co krocan?

Lilith: Ty už ho pouze naplníš." (S04E07 – Vypečený Den Díkuvzdání)

In both cases of ambiguity in the Czech dialogue, Lilith and Niles only refer to the turkey. In the first case, Niles' insult towards Lilith disappears by using the word *rozmražování,* which cannot be applied for humans (for such a combination, the word *rozmrznutí* would have to be used instead). Although there is a problem with *defrosting,* perhaps a similar relationship could be used that exists in Czech (in the meaning of either being done with something or being exhausted).

Lilith: Takže dodělej toho krocana, prosím tě.
Niles: No, krocana jsem nikdy nedělal, ale tady je recept, snad si s tím nějak poradím.
Jak daleko jsi došla?
Lilith: Jsem téměř hotová.
Niles: A co krocan?

Another insult, this time from Lilith's side, is lost in translation which only preserved one meaning of *stuff it,* referring to the stuffing of the turkey. It is a shame, because the ambiguity could have been preserved, even if not in the same way, but it still could use the relationship between the two meanings, which is very similar in Czech. For example:

Niles: A co krocan?

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[*] *There is even another basic mistake in translation: Lilith says she's nearly done defrosting, but the Czech translation sounds as if she was only about to start.*

Lilith: Co kdybyste se šli oba vycpat?

While on the matter of fixed phrases as parts of ambiguities, *The Big Bang Theory* includes another one. It occurs in the episode where Leonard, a shy experimental physicist, finally manages to get a date with his colleague, Leslie Winkle. He invites her over to his and Sheldon's place and asks him for a favour – to leave the appartment for the night. Sheldon, with his total absence of tact and inability to understand hints, is shocked and curious about the reason.

"Leonard: Why, what's so unusual about me having a date?

Sheldon: Well, statistically speaking...

Leonard: Alright, alright. Well, uh, nevertheless, I have one now and I would appreciate it if you would, you know, make yourself scarce.

Sheldon: Leonard, I am a published theoretical physicist with two doctorates and an IQ which can't be accurately measured by normal tests, how much scarcer could I be?" (S02E02 – The Codpiece Topology)

To make oneself scarce, a slang phrase in the meaning of leaving a certain place, is used by Leonard as a request upon Sheldon to give him and his new girlfriend some privacy. Of course, Sheldon again fails to comprehend such things as slang or hints and interprets Leonard's request literally, which creates the ambiguity (which, as was already mentioned and demonstrated, is a very common process in the series).

Unfortunately, the humorousness was not preserved in the translation into Czech:

"Leonard: Proč? Je to snad tak nezvyklý, že mám rande?

Sheldon: Ze statistického hlediska...

Leonard: Dobře, dobře. Nicméně to rande stejně mám a uvítal bych, chápeš, kdybys teď zmizel.

Sheldon: Leonarde, jsem publikující fyzik se dvěma doktoráty a IQ neměřitelným běžnými testy. Není možné, abych zmizel." (S02E02 – Topologie váčkovitého poklopce)

It almost seems improbable that the translators (who had proved themselves relatively capable in many previous cases of problematic translation) were not able to come up with a better solution in this particular case and simply gave up on it completely. Sheldon's last line ("How much scarcer could I be?") in Czech translation ("Není možné, abych zmizel.") not only does not preserve the amusing element, but it does not even make sense. By using the word *zmizet* (meaning *to disappear*), which only responds to one of the possible interpretations of the original, the overall Czech version evokes an unspoken question of why should Sheldon (as an ingenious published scientist) disappear. A much better result could have been produced by using, for instance, the word *výskyt:*

Leonard: Nicméně, to rande stejně mám a uvítal bych, chápeš, kdyby ses tady v té době nevyskytoval.

Sheldon: Leonarde, jsem publikující fyzik se dvěma doktoráty a IQ neměřitelným běžnými testy. Můj výskyt už nemůže být omezenější.

By using the word *výskyt* (in the meaning of *occurrence*), which can be used as a slang term for the activity of being somewhere, the joke about Sheldon's supposed rarity could have been preserved.

6.4   Summary

Both sitcoms include numerous jokes that are based on various kinds of ambiguity. Surprisingly, there are almost none that can be placed into the category of pure syntactic ambiguity. Subsequently, those jokes and puns that involve ambiguity based on syntax, usually involve some other kind of ambiguity as well (such as lexical or referential).

Generally, it could be said that the translation of jokes and wordplay based on ambiguity into Czech is more successful in *The Big Bang Theory* than in *Frasier*. If there is an untranslatable one and the original value cannot be kept, the translators of *The Big Bang Theory* attempt to, if not partially preserve the humorous elements, at least provide an alternative that works best in Czech language (by using the technique of equivalence). In *Frasier,* the translation usually follows the easier way and solves the problematic passages by simply leaving out one of the possible meanings, which usually results in the loss of the humorous elements. What remains then is merely the informative value of the dialogues.

On the other hand, it has to be emphasized that most of the puns that can be found in *Frasier* are much more elaborated and therefore also much more difficult to translate or interpret in any way than those in *The Big Bang Theory*. On one hand, the dialogues in *Frasier* mostly involve jokes that are based on polysemy or homonymy, while *The Big Bang Theory* ambiguities are based on many more homophones. What also provides better conditions for the translation of ambiguity in

The Big Bang Theory is the fact that it is very frequently not only brought up in the dialogues, but also subsequently explained and analyzed (notice Sheldon's inability to understand hints or slang and his subsequent wrong comprehension which very frequently goes hand in hand with bringing up ambiguity in an originally disambiguating context). Meanwhile in *Frasier* the resolution lies on the shoulders of the spectator, since its humorous effect is usually only subtly implied.

In addition, let us not overloook the crucial factor of time, or rather the lack of it – if the translator needs to meet a deadline, there may be not enough time to come up with suitable equivalents.

Although translation of ambiguity humour in *Frasier* at times is also quite successful, the original effect of the jokes is mostly preserved only in those cases that can be translated directly or happen to have a similar equivalent in Czech language. The overall quality of translation is characterized also by other mistakes, which are not exceptional in *Frasier,* but they are quite unique in *The Big Bang Theory*.

CONCLUSION

Ambiguity, although highly undesirable in common everyday communication, is very popular as a source of humor and wordplay in fictional discourse. The possibility of one word, phrase or even sentence having multiple meanings (and subsequently, wrong or different comprehension, usually on one of the sides of the dialogue) is often used as a basis for numerous amusing or even embarrassing situations (such as in *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*).

On the other hand, in texts other than humorous (or artistic), ambiguity is a phenomenon of a much lower frequency. When it occurs there, it is usually not intentional, in many cases difficult to detect and recognize, or sometimes even doubtful. By using tests for ambiguity, one can make sure about particular cases of ambiguity by exploring their characteristics, such as the possibility of using all of the possible meanings differently or creating a zeugma. These tests may become very useful in texts where an ambiguity occurs by accident (without the intention of the author) and help not to overestimate the amount of it.

However, as was already mentioned, ambiguity is more than desirable in texts whose humour is based especially on wordplay. In such a text/discourse, since it is in most cases aimed at pleasing and amusing the audience (which, for a text to be popular, needs to consist of average spectators), there are scarcely any problems with recognizing the ambiguity, or even having to prove its existence (for instance, in *The Big Bang Theory,* ambiguity is often not just introduced in the dialogue, but also pointed out, and explained by some of the characters).

When talking about the resolution of ambiguity, it is a very similar thing - by the help of context and frequency, one is able to choose the correct one out of the previously subconsciously activated meanings (which may take time, especially in

case of unintentional ambiguity in a text). On the other hand, with jokes (that are primarily created to amuse), the humorous effect would be lost if the process of resolution was complicated or took too long, so the usually it is so quick that one does not have time at all to realize it is even happening.

It is undoubtedly true that ambiguity occurs on the lexical as well as the syntactic level (most theorists also use this classification). However, categorization of this kind appears quite problematic in practice. Surprisingly enough, as became apparent by thorough analysis of the jokes based on ambiguity that occur in the series *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*, there are almost none based on pure syntactic ambiguity. One of the main reasons for this may be that jokes that are based on pure syntactic ambiguity are not of a very wide variety. Although syntactic ambiguity may be based on whichever of the parts of speech, the procedure of creating a pure syntactic ambiguity joke is almost always the same, so there is no point in using it very frequently. In fact, ambiguity jokes in the two sitcoms could be categorized in two large groups – those that are based on lexical ambiguity and those that are based on borderline ambiguity (this groups includes mainly the lexico – syntactic jokes and the lexico – referential jokes).

Translation of the ambiguity-based jokes and wordplay in *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory* to Czech language proved to be quite a challenging task. There were, of course, few of the rare cases when either by direct translation or by using the translational technique of equivalence or compensation, almost completely successful translation was enabled. Even if a suitable equivalent in Czech language was absent, it was always possible to find an alternative which would work in a similar way and have a similar effect on the spectator. However, most of them were not at all simple. As was expected and as the analysis of examples from both series

showed, in many cases the translators chose the easy way out of the problem and simply omitted one of the (usually two) possible meanings, destroying the humorous effect and leaving mere informative value of the joke or wordplay. This happens mostly in *Frasier,* whose ambiguity jokes are more elaborated than those in *The Big Bang Theory* and therefore, in most cases, they are more difficult to translate. On the other hand, there have been a few cases of a highly successful translation as well (which may raise a question whether all of them were a work of one particular translator, or whether they were simply incidental). Translation of *The Big Bang Theory* ambiguity jokes, surprisingly, at times proved to be quite successful. Usually it attempts to at least solve the problem by preserving the humorousness partially – for example, one of the most frequent approaches involves using only one of the possible meanings and insert the other one into the dialogue in a descriptive way.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the original dialogues in *Frasier* contain many more difficult challenges, the translation to Czech language could have been a lot better in even more aspects than just ambiguity (in fact, mistakes in basic grammar are not unique here).

In short, the task of translating ambiguities is in itself quite demanding, which often results in its overall omission, although very frequently a better alternative is possible. However, the fact is that there are far less options to create a joke based on ambiguity in Czech than in English language, so it is not always possible to come up with a solution that would be equally effective. Judging from the fact that translation of *The Big Bang Theory* is generally better than in *Frasier* (which is quite a lot older), it may be a sign the overall quality of translation may be gradually becoming higher with the progress of time.

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Resumé/Summary
Cieľom práce je podať stručný pohľad na ambiguitu ako jazykový jav s osobitným dôrazom na jej preklad. Teoretická časť práce poskytuje prehľad jednotlivých druhov a spôsobov klasifikácie ambiguity, spôsoby jej identifikácie, riešenia a v konečnom dôsledku úspešného prekladu. Praktická časť je pokusom o demonštráciu poznatkov uvedených v teoretickej časti na príkladoch vyňatých z dvoch amerických seriálov – *Frasier* a *The Big Bang Theory*. Zahŕňa analýzu jednotlivých extraktov z pôvodného textu, ich preklady do českého jazyka, komentár k prekladom, ako aj (na v rámci prekladu problematických miestach) návrhy vhodnejších alternatív.

The aim of the thesis is to provide a brief view on the ambiguity as a phenomena in language with a special emphasis on its translation. The theoretical part offers a survey of individual kinds of ambiguity as well as the ways of its classification, identification, resolution and finally, successful translation. The practical part attempts to demonstrate the facts introduced in the theoretical part on the examples extracted from two American sitcoms *Frasier* and *The Big Bang Theory*. It involves the analysis of individual extracts from the original text, their translations to Czech language, a commentary on the translation as well as (in terms of passages that were problematic in translation) suggestions for more suitable alternatives.

ZHRNUTIE

Ambiguita (viacznačnosť) je jedným z jazykových javov, ktoré môžu byť rovnako zdrojom problémov pri komunikácii, ako aj základom slovných hračiek. Možno ju označiť za jav spôsobujúci ťažkosti, rovnako však môže byť aj zdrojom potešenia (napríklad humoru). V prvom prípade je to teda jav nežiaduci, ktorému je najvhodnejšie sa vyhýbať, v druhom prípade je ju však väčšinou vhodné zachovať. To môže byť veľmi ťažkou úlohou, predovšetkým čo sa týka prekladu. Táto práca je pokusom o krátke zhrnutie relevantných teoretických poznatkov o viacznačnosti, jej spôsoboch kategorizácie a jednotlivých druhoch, jej rozpoznaní v texte, jej riešení, preklade z anglického do českého jazyka a nakoniec aplikáciu týchto poznatkov na konkrétnych príkladoch z dvoch amerických sitcomov – *Frasier* a *The Big Bang Theory.*

Angličtina je jazyk, v ktorom je výskyt viacznačností pomerne vysoký. Možno ich klasifikovať na rôzne druhy, väčšina lingvistov zaoberajúcich sa touto problematikou sa však drží hlavného rozdelenia na lexikálnu ambiguitu (vyskytujúcu sa na úrovni lexikálnych jednotiek – polysémia, homonýmia, homofónia a homografia) a syntaktickú ambiguitu (vyskytujúcu sa na úrovni slovných spojení, fráz a viet). Táto klasifikácia sa však môže v mnohých prípadoch ukázať ako nie celkom ideálna (predovšetkým vzhľadom na to, že určiť jednoznačne hranice medzi syntaktickou a lexikálnou viacznačnosťou môže byť pomerne problematické, ba v niektorých prípadoch takmer až nemožné) a viacerí autori prišli s vlastným, o niečo odlišným rozdelením, ktoré podľa nich lepšie kategorizuje tento mnohotvárny jav - za všetky napríklad rozdelenie D. A. Crusea na čisto syntaktickú, kvázi-syntaktickú, lexikálno- syntaktickú a nakoniec čisto lexikálnu ambiguitu (1997, 67, vlastný preklad).

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Ako už bolo spomenuté, ambiguita môže byť javom vítaným, ale rovnako aj úplne nežiaducim. Ako nežiaduci inhibítor komunikácie môže byť úmyselná (použitá s úmyslom poslucháča či čitateľa zámerne zmiasť), ale aj neúmyselná (vyskytujúca sa v texte náhodou, napríklad vďaka chybe alebo nepozornosti autora). Nech už je však zámer autora akýkoľvek, väčšinou je nutné ambiguitu v texte správne rozpoznať a ako takú ju aj identifikovať. Úplne ojedinelé nie sú však ani prípady, keď sa miera viacznačnosti v texte preceňuje – je dôležité nájsť správnu mieru a nepripisovať viacznačnosť textom, ktoré ňou vlastne ani nedisponujú. Za účelom stanovenia textu ako viacznačného bolo vytvorených niekoľko rôznych druhov testov, pomocou ktorých možno ambiguitu identifikovať, napríklad test Lynne Murphyovej za pomoci kontrastu (2010, 84, vlastný preklad), ktorý je mimochodom hlavným z testov, pomocou ktorých sú detekované prípady viacznačnosti v príkladoch uvedených v praktickej časti práce.

Jedným z najobtiažnejších krokov k úspešnému prekladu môže byť samotné riešenie viacznačností, čiže z predošlého kroku vyplývajúce uvedomenie si jednotlivých možných významov daného textu (prípadne časti textu) a (pokiaľ samozrejme neistota ohľadne správneho riešenia nie je súčasťou základu pre humorný efekt) výber toho správneho. Tento proces prebieha v ľudských mysliach zvyčajne takou rýchlosťou, že si ho ani neuvedomujeme. Na jeho začiatku je aktivácia všetkých možných (resp. všetkých, ktorých si je poslucháč/čitateľ v danej chvíli vedomý) významov. Podľa Seidenberga a i. tento proces nezaberie viac než 200 milisekúnd (1982, 489). Existujú však samozrejme aj prípady (a to predovšetkým u viacznačností, ktoré sú zdrojom humoru), kedy je vedomá aktivácia viacerých možných významov dôležitou podmienkou na patričné ocenenie účinku humornej pasáže.

Spôsoby riešenia lexikálnych a syntaktických viacznačností sa v mnohom líšia, v niektorých prípadoch sú si však naopak podobné. Jedným z faktorov, ktoré majú hlavnú úlohu u riešení oboch typov, je frekvencia – častosť výskytu jednotlivých možných významov. Neplatí to síce vždy, ale vo väčšine prípadov výskytu viacznačnosti je správnou možnosťou ten význam, ktorý sa používa z daných možností (naj)častejšie – platí to tak pre významy slov, ako aj pre významy rozsiahlejších jazykových jednotiek.

Ďalším podstatným faktorom (a to zrejme tým najvýznamnejším) je kontext – či už gramatický alebo sémantický. Sila kontextu môže byť rôzna – silný kontext jednotlivé viacznačnosti môže až úplne eliminovať, slabý však nápomocný v riešení nie je (alebo nie dostatočne). Gramatický kontext môže vylúčiť gramaticky neprijateľné konštrukcie, zatiaľ čo sémantický kontext predstavuje podmienky, v rámci ktorého sú akceptovateľné len určité významy. Prostredníctvom kontextu je riešená väčšina prípadov ambiguity.

Samotný preklad textov, ktoré sú viacznačné, je, ako už bolo povedané, pre prekladateľov často skutočne veľká výzva. Je nutné nielen ambiguitu v texte rozpoznať a vyriešiť, ale tiež zvoliť taký prístup k prekladu, ktorý originálny text neolúpi o jeho pôvodnú hodnotu. Prekladatelia sa často potýkajú s otázkami, či je vôbec možné v preklade originálu ambiguitu zachovať, či je vhodné (a možné) nahradiť ju niečím, čo by malo aspoň do istej miery podobnú efektivitu, alebo či dokonca nie je najlepšie preložiť daný text doslovne a poskytnúť vysvetlenie toho, v čom viacznačnosť originálu spočívala (väčšina prekladateľov, ale aj spotrebiteľov sa však zhoduje na tom, že posledné riešenie nie je ideálne, nakoľko pri jeho uplatnení sa oberáme o okamžitý účinok (predovšetkým u textov, kde ambiguita je základom humoru)). Vzhľadom na rozličnosť a pestrosť jednotlivých jazykov

(napríklad angličtina v porovnaní s češtinou) sú prípady, kedy je možné zachovať ambiguitu aspoň čiastočne, veľmi ojedinelé. Pomocou prekladateľských techník ako ekvivalencia (spočívajúca v nahradení daného textu takým, ktorý má v cieľovom jazyku podobný význam) alebo kompenzácia (strata významu, prípadne inej súčasti originálu je kompenzovaná pridaním na inom mieste), atď. (Fawcett 199, 31 – 38) je možné ak aj nie zachovať pôvodnú viacznačnosť originálu, tak aspoň prísť s textom, ktorý by mal podobný efekt, aký mal originál.

Praktická časť práce uvádza príklady rôznych druhov viacznačnosti z už spomenutých amerických seriálov *Frasier* a *The Big Bang Theory* spolu s ich prekladmi do češtiny. Ako situačné komédie ich obsahujú skutočne mnoho, nakoľko ambiguita v nich funguje ako základ pre veľké množstvo humorných pasáží. Navyše, každý z oboch seriálov pokrýva inú sféru života a sústreďuje sa na odlišné postavy, i keď v oboch sú protagonistami vysoko vzdelané osoby (v seriáli *Frasier* psychiatri, bratia – doktori Frasier Crane a Niles Crane, a v seriáli *The Big Bang Theory* fyzici, predovšetkým geniálny teoretický fyzik, doktor Sheldon Cooper). Bohužiaľ je nutné skonštatovať, že v oboch prekladoch sa neraz odzrkadľuje skutočnosť, že na väčšinu z nich prekladatelia vzhľadom na periodicitu vysielania nemajú dostatok času a preto sú nútení podriadiť kvalitu prekladu nutnosti rýchlosti jeho vyhotovenia. Takisto je nevyhnutné vziať do úvahy dabing a nutnosť prispôsobiť dĺžku výpovede v češtine dĺžke výpovede v angličtine. Kvalita prekladu však nie je vo všetkých prípadoch mizivá – v prekladoch oboch seriálov sa vyskytujú naopak aj prípady prekvapujúco kreatívne a pôsobivé.

Práca sa snaží dať odpoveď na otázky, aké druhy viacznačnosti sa v daných sitcomoch vyskytujú, v akom množstve, ako ich možno rozpoznať, aké majú spôsoby riešenia, upozorňuje na ich jednotlivé zvláštnosti a špecifiká a konečne –

komentuje kvalitu ich prekladu do češtiny. Prekvapujúcou skutočnosťou je nepochybne fakt, že napríklad syntaktická ambiguita sa ako zdroj humoru v sitcomoch takmer vôbec nevyskytuje (praktická časť uvádza len jediný konkrétny príklad zo seriálu *The Big Bang Theory*, viď praktickú časť – podkapitola 7.2). Dôvodom je pravdepodobne to, že slovné hračky založené na syntaktických vzťahoch nie sú veľmi pestré a nemožno ich teda použiť viackrát, aby pre diváka nepôsobili jednotvárne.

Do istej miery neočakávaná je aj skutočnosť, že väčšia časť prípadov viacznačnosti v daných seriáloch sa nedá jednoznačne zaradiť do žiadnej z dvoch veľkých skupín (lexikálnej a syntaktickej viacznačnosti), pretože sú na pomedzí oboch kategórií, prípadne obsahujú takzvanú referenčnú viacznačnosť, ktorá „ ... sa vyskytuje, keď nás kontext nenasmeruje k tomu, na čo by špecifická fráza alebo slovo mohlo odkazovať" (Hughes and Lavery 2004, 65, vlastný preklad).

Hoci v oboch seriáloch sa vyskytujú, ako už bolo povedané, aj kvalitnejšie preklady, dalo by sa povedať, že preklady príkladov zo seriálu *Frasier* sú všeobecne menej kvalitné než tých zo seriálu *The Big Bang Theory*. Okrem neodškriepiteľnej kreativite, ktorá je vyššia u prekladateľov *The Big Bang Theory,* však môže byť dôvodom aj charakter jednotlivých prípadov viacznačnosti. *Frasier* obsahuje predovšetkým veľmi prepracované vtipy, založené hlavne na homonýmii a polysémii, zatiaľ čo *The Big Bang Theory* prekypuje vtipmi majúcimi základ v homofónii. Navyše aj tie pasáže, ktorých humor tu má pôvod v polysémii alebo homonýmii, sú zjednodušené tým, že postavy na ne vo svojich dialógoch vo väčšine prípadov nielen upozorňujú, ale ich aj samy analyzujú a vysvetlia (čo síce prekvapivo väčšinou nie je na úkor humoru, ale rozhodne to zjednodušuje situáciu prekladateľa). Celkovo je však stále veľa prípadov, u ktorých sa prekladatelia oboch seriálov rozhodli

jednoducho daný vtip vynechať, preložiť dané miesto priamo a tým pádom ponechať dialógu len jeho informatívnu hodnotu. Práca okrem komentára k prekladu prichádza s alternatívnymi prekladmi ako variantami k menej kvalitným prekladom prípadov viacznačnosti.

Ako povzbudzujúcu skutočnosť do budúcna čiastočne môžeme brať to, že kvalita prekladu seriálu *The Big Bang Theory* (vysielaný od roku 2007), ktorý je novší než *Frasier* (vysielaný od roku 1993 do roku 2004), je v mnohých prípadoch skutočne vyššia, čo môže signalizovať zlepšovanie a pokrok v rámci televíznych prekladov všeobecne.

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