

# How Cultural Differences Influence Translations of Sitcoms

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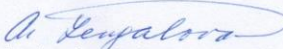
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá kulturními rozdíly a zkoumá, jak mohou ovlivnit překlad sitcomů (situačních komedií), zejména analyzovaného amerického sitcomu Přátelé. Toto téma je v dnešní době aktuální, jelikož lidé na celém světě jsou čím dál více obklopováni zahraničními filmy, knihami, či právě zmiňovanými sitcomy.

Teoretická část popisuje různé termíny a jevy, které souvisejí s teorií překladu. Dále také charakterizuje americkou kulturu a informuje o tom, jak by se měl správným způsobem překládat humor. Praktická část této bakalářské práce porovnává anglickou a českou verzi analyzovaného sitcomu. Analýza je rozdělena podle problémů, kterým museli překladatelé čelit během překladu tohoto sitcomu.

Klíčová slova: překlad, kultura, rozdíl, anglický, český, sitcom, humor

## **ABSTRACT**

This bachelor thesis deals with the cultural differences and how they can influence the translation of the sitcoms, namely the American sitcom Friends. It is a current topic since people from all over the world are more and more surrounded by foreign films, books or sitcoms.

The theoretical part describes various terms and phenomena connected with the theory of translation. It also characterizes the American culture and gives some information about translating the humor. The practical part of the thesis compares the English and the Czech versions of the analyzed sitcom. The analysis is divided according to problems the translators had to deal with during translating the sitcom.

Keywords: translation, culture, difference, English, Czech, sitcom, humor

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## INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis deals with the cultural differences and how they can influence the translation of the sitcoms. Nowadays, people from all over the world are surrounded by various films, sitcoms or books that do not have the origin in their native country but which were created abroad. Each culture is somehow specific and distinct from others, what influences the form of every cultural piece of work and sitcoms are no exception. For other cultures then may be difficult to understand the humor of the sitcom. This is the task for translators to make the sitcom or another cultural piece of work available and understandable for the target audience. As will be demonstrated in the practical part there are many possible ways how to succeed in this laborious task.

Since this thesis describes the differences in Czech and English version of the sitcom, also the theoretical part focuses mainly on these languages and cultures. Apart from the theoretical part, the thesis includes also the practical part, which forms the second part of the paper.

The theoretical part firstly explains what translation is and states some facts about how the proper translation should look like and which rules concerning the process of translation should be fulfilled. Another part of the first chapter describes several types of translation according to Jakobson, Knittlová or Hervey and Higgins. The first chapter is also comprised of translation approaches, problematic features in translation, which is then divided into the explanation of complete, partial and zero translation respectively. The whole chapter is concluded with the description of the topic of non-equivalence at word level and with communicative and reproductive principle based on the book *Překlad jako tvorba* from Viličkovský. The second chapter is dedicated to brief description of American culture because the analyzed sitcom was created in the United States of America, hence it incorporates a lot of culture-specific terms, customs and situations. Since the analyzed material is sitcom, the third chapter deals with translating the humor which is typical for this special genre of a comedy. The last chapter of the theoretical part deals with the history of subtitling and states some differences between dubbing and subtitling.

The practical part is divided into three chapters. The First chapter describes the analyzed material which is the American sitcom *Friends*. There is briefly outlined the plot and the characteristics of the protagonists. The second chapter states the methods used when analyzing the sitcom and the last part deals with the analysis as such. The analysis is

divided according to problems, the translators had to deal with during translating the sitcom.

## **I. THEORY**

## 1 TRANSLATION

According to Peter Newmark, the translation renders the meaning of a text into another language and it has to preserve the way which was the author's purpose. It may sound simple to translate the text into another language but the truth is that it is complicated and demanding process. As Newmark claims, the translation of the text does not depend only on the translator but also on other features as for example the writer of the text, the norms, culture, setting and tradition of both source language and target language, as well as the readership of target language (1988, 4-5).

### 1.1 How to translate

Dagmar Knittlová states in her book *Překlad a Překládání* that the translator's most important role nowadays is overcoming the intercultural barriers, to which should be the whole translation process submitted. The theory of translation has developed and one of the biggest issues was considered the problem of equivalence. The conveyance of all information from the text in the source language into the target language is the most important requirement for translation, irrespective of the differences in the grammars of these two languages (2010, 7).

Nowadays is not as important to use the same linguistic devices in the source language and target language as it used to be before. The fact that the linguistic devices convey the same semantic, factual, connotative and pragmatic function is more significant today. This translation principle is called Functionalist approach and was described by British translation theorist J.C. Catford (Knittlová 2010, 7).

Ján Vilikovský also comments on this topic in his book *Překlad jako tvorba*, where he is describing so called optimism of translation. This phenomenon is based on the idea that the translation is always possible because the language is mainly the bearer of the information about non-linguistic situations and phonology, syntax, stylistics and other linguistic disciplines are used only to encode the information. And the aim of translation is to preserve the information and the meaning, not the linguistic devices of the translated text. It follows that the translators should always focus on the text as a whole and not on the individual parts from which it consists of (2002, 20-21).

In the case that a text, for example a book, is translated correctly, the reader should not be able to recognize that he/she is actually reading the translated text but should consider it

as the text which has been written in his/her native language. And in order to create quality translation, these three fundamental requirements should be fulfilled:

- linguistic expressions are natural in the target language,
- the meaning of the translated text must be preserved and the text must have the same effect on the target audience as on the source audience,
- dynamics of the text must be preserved and the text must cause the same reaction in the target language as it did in the source language (Knittlová 2010, 14-15).

The rules of translation are changing but the main idea stays the same. The French scholar and translator Etienne Dolet formulated the statement of translation principles as far back as in 1540. He summarized them in these five points:

- to understand the source text perfectly,
- to be very good at the source language and also the target language,
- to avoid word to word translation,
- to use everyday language and not to use unknown words and neologisms,
- to organize the words in order to produce the overall effect with an appropriate tone (Vilikovský 2002, 70-71).

## 1.2 Types of translation

There are two main types of the translation. The first of them focuses primarily on the form and the translator's main concern is the agreement of the form and contents between the source and target language. This type of translation is profusely used in the formal texts, for example in documents. The other type concentrates more on the meaning of the text. It is called communicative translation and its aim is that the text should have the same effect on the readers of the target language as on the readers of the source language. According to Dagmar Knittová, the communicative translation is used more and more.

Roman Jakobson distinguishes these three types:

- **Intralingual translation (rewording):** interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. This translation of a word employs another, more or less synonymous, word to replace it (*sad – blue, talkative – chatty, quiet – silence*).

- **Intersemiotic translation (transmutation):** interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. It is transposition from one system of signs into another one, for example from the book to the film (*the book Forrest Gump – the film Forrest Gump, the comic book X-men – the film X-men*).
- **Interlingual translation (proper translation):** interpretation of verbal signs by means of different language (*beautiful – krásný, sad – smutný, quiet – ticho*).

Since this bachelor thesis deals with the translation of the sitcom from one language to another interlingual translation will be described more elaborately. This type of translation is divided into:

- **Interlinear translation:** this is the most extreme example of the literal translation. This type of translation does not respect the grammar of the target language and because of that is also the least used one (*I gave him the book yesterday – Já dal jsem mu tu knihu včera*).
- **Literal translation:** this type of translation considers the grammar of the target language, although does not respect the fixed collocations and idioms in order to retain the forms of the original text as much as possible. The final text is grammatically correct but the target audience does not usually consider it very natural (*I ordered him to brush his teeth – Poručil jsem mu, aby si vykartáčoval zuby*).
- **Free translation:** this is the complete opposite to the interlinear translation. This type is not also considered as the correct translation either, except of the interpreting, since it does not consider for example stylistic and aesthetical features (*For more information, see our terms and conditions – Více informací naleznete v našich obchodních podmínkách*).
- **Communicative translation:** this type is related to the pragmatic side of the translation and it is used mainly when translating conventional formulas, proverbs or idioms (*The early bird catches the worm – Ranní ptáče dál doskáče*).

(Knittlová 2010, 15-18)

The translation tends to be the mixture of all the types stated above, except of the interlinear translation, that one is used only very scarcely. The important thing to consider when translating is what type or genre the translator is working on. In the case of formal

documents is advisable to use the literal translation than the free translation because in these types of texts the emphasis is put on the information, which must be preserved. On the other hand, when translating belles-lettres, the free translation is more suitable because the emphasis is put more on the preserving the same perception of the readers than the exactness of the information. Provided that the meaning of the text is not changed (Knittlová 2010, 16).

Opinions regarding the above mentioned types have been changing in time. According to Knittlová, these are the most important and current translation criteria: accuracy, clarity and spontaneity (2010, 18).

In the translation studies is an emphasis currently laid on the process of translating, of which result is the translated text. In the first case there is the makro-level approach to the translated text, which deals with cultural background, historical and local fitting, the author's attitude to the topic, etc. Then, there is a mikro-level approach, which deals with the particular grammatical structures and by which the ultimate appearance of the target text is created (Knittlová 2010, 27).

According to Knittlová various experts on translation consider as the most significant and important something a little bit different. For example Mona Baker pays most attention to textual equivalence. On the contrary, Hatim and Mason deal more with the ideational and interpersonal functions. Hervey and Higgins put the emphasis on the cultural transposition, which means the conversion of the text from one culture the other. They distinguish five degrees of deviation from the source text. The result is that the foreign features are reduced and also to some extent naturalized. The scale is from one extreme, which is based on the source culture (exoticism) to the other extreme, which is based on the target culture (cultural transplantation):

- **Exoticism:** the adaptation of the word from the source language without any change or just with the adjustment in spelling (*Delhi* : *Dilji*).
- **Calque:** it involves the words from target language but in the structure from the source language (*skyscraper* : *mrakodrap*).
- **Cultural borrowing:** the word from the source text is literally translated into the target language (*langue, parole*).
- **Communicative translation:** it is used especially with special collocations and phrases, which would be in the target language meaningless (*no entry* : *vstup zakázán*).

- **Cultural transplantation:** replacement for example of the name by the different name which is used in the target language under the same circumstances as in the source language (*Jack and Jill : Jeniček a Mařenka*) (Hervey and Higgins 2002, 33-38).

### 1.3 The translation approaches

If there is no direct equivalent in the target language to the word used in the source text, a few methods exist how to deal with this situation:

- **Transcription:** the transcript of the word into the target language, taking into account the pronunciation of the target language (*Mao-tse-tung changes from /mawdzung/ to /mawtsetung/*).
- **Calque:** the literal translation (*potflower – hrnková květina*).
- **Substitution:** the replacement of one language expression by another. The most commonly are the nouns replaced by the pronouns (*Mary – she*).
- **Transposition:** it deals with the grammatical changes which are with respect to the differences in the languages (*United Airlines Flight 93 – letadlo United Airlines, linka 93*).
- **Modulation:** the change of the point of view (*elbow of the pipe – koleno potrubí*).
- **Equivalence:** the structural and stylistic means are used differently than in the original text (*my sweet girl – děvenka*).
- **Adaptation:** the whole situation in source text is replaced by other similar one. It is used especially with fixed collocations as idioms or proverbs (*once in a blue moon – jednou za uherský rok*).

Naturally, the linguists are still introducing new terms as for example amplification (expansion of the text), explicitation (the adding of the explaining information), divergence, convergence or re-ordering (the change of the word order) (Knittlová 2010, 18-20).

### 1.4 Problematic features in translation

When translating from English to Czech, many differences can be found. Either in denotative meaning (literal meaning), connotative (this meaning is based on implication or shared emotional association with the word) or pragmatic. The most important is to



distinguish the standard text from non-standard, common vocabulary from the technical, the centre from the periphery and to take into consideration the genre and style of the translated text. Knittlová distinguishes these three types of the translation:

- complete,
- partial,
- zero.

These types will be now described more in detail and the related examples will be given (2010, 39-40).

#### 1.4.1 Complete translation

There are the words, which form the centre of the vocabulary, as for example the body parts, objects with which people are in contact every day, animals, time figures, etc. The complete translation is usually identical also in the level of formality, so both words are one-word or multi-word (*a house – dům; go home – jít domů; go to bed – jít do postele*) (Knittlová 2003, 33-35).

#### 1.4.2 Partial translation

English and Czech are the languages with very different cultural, historical and geographical point of view and the countries are also very far from each other and each of them respects different customs and traditions. Because of this fact there are not many words which could be translated using complete translation and the partial translation is more often. The languages are different from these points of view:

- **Formal:** these differences are connected mainly with the one-word and multi-word expressions. There are more multi-word expressions in English than in Czech. So what happens very often when translating is that the English multi-word expression is translated into Czech as one-word expression (e.g.: *the poor man – chudák, tear to pieces – roztrhat, most importantly – hlavně*). The multi-word expressions are usually also more explicit, which means that they carry more information (e.g.: *to polish to high glitter – vyleštit*).
- **Denotative:** the semantic difference, which is connected to denotative meaning, arises from the diverse level of abstraction, emphasizing different feature, etc. The Czech translation, compared to the English word, includes very often something

more. This is so called specification or substitution by hyponym. When translating from English to Czech, there is very scarcely the opposite situation – the generalization or the substitution by the hyperonym. Since English is a nominal language and Czech is a verbal language, it is quite logical that the substitution by hyponym is used mainly when translating the verbs. For example the English verb *to go* can be translated into Czech as *jít, jet, odjet, přijet, vyrazit, vést, etc.*

- **Connotative:** in every language, there are some typical connotations which cannot be expressed precisely in the other language, for example the diminutives. In English, diminutives are usually formed by adding a new word as for example *little*, whereas in Czech the whole word is changed in order to form the diminutive (*a little girl – holčička, a little while – chvílička*).
- **Pragmatic:** in this case the translator must take into consideration different knowledge and experience of the addressees in the source language and in the target language. He/she then can solve the pragmatic differences by these methods:
  - The adding of information: it is connected especially with the situations, when the translator expects that there is some information in the text, which will be unclear for the readers (*Colorado – stát Colorado, New York Times – noviny New York Times*).
  - The omitting of information: the translator can omit some information, which would be unknown for the readers (*Eastern College talk – Hovory o škole*).
  - The substitution of parallels of facts and experience from the target language: this method is used mainly with conversion of the units because Czech reader would not understand for example the term *five inches*, so it should be translated as *twelve and a half centimetres*.
  - The explaining transcription: the translator must explain some terms, which would be misunderstood by the target readers (*Windsor tie – mašle pod bradou*) (Knittlová 2003, 35-84).

### 1.4.3 Zero translation

In case that there is no adequate equivalent in the target language, the takeover of the foreign word usually comes about. It concerns especially the proper names (*Harry – Harry*)

or geographical names (*Ohio – Ohio*). The foreign words may be also adapted to the spelling or pronunciation of the target language (*uncle Thomas- strýc Tomáš, auntie Jane – tetička Jana*) (Knittlová 2003, 84-85).

## 1.5 Non-equivalence at word level

Non-equivalence at word level means that in the target language there does not exist a direct translation for the word in the source language. Translators have to deal with this problem and they mainly have to consider the context of the situation described.

Bellow some of the common types of non-equivalence at word level follow:

- **Culture-specific concepts:** The concept in the source language may be completely unknown in the target language. These words are connected with religion, cultural customs or food and drinks. The literal translation of these words is not very good for the reader in the target language because he/she will not understand the term. In this case is recommended to describe the unknown word or not to translate it but to compare it to something people of the target culture know and understand. The example could be the Czech word *guláš*. For Czech nation it is typical and well-known food but for foreign people it does not have to be as clear as for the Czech people. The name of food is not usually translated but it could be described in menus as the *beef meat with red pepper and onion sauce and dumplings*.
- **The source-language concept is not lexicalized in the target language:** The word in the source-language may express something which is known in the target culture but they do not have a word for it. For example English word *landslide*. In Czech culture we know the situation when somebody wins thanks to the majority of votes. In Czech language we would translate it as *drtivé vítězství* or *získat naprostou většinu hlasů*. However, we do not have a word for it.
- **The source-language word is semantically complex:** in the source-language there can exist a word which cannot be translated into the target-language by one word but translators must use more words to be precise and to explain the meaning of the word to the target-audience.
- **The source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning:** the target-language may have more or fewer meanings of some words than the source-language. The example could be for example the number of names Eskimos have for the snow (Baker 2001, 20-26).

## 1.6 Communicative versus reproductive principle

According to translation theories, the most important thing when translating is that the translated text, especially literary work, should reproduce the aesthetical values, which are described in the original text. At the same time, the text should have the same effect on the readers of source audience and the ones of target audience. However, the inevitable problem is caused by this. Since for instance English readers understand the whole text in the English (source) language even with the least noticeable remarks and allusions. Nevertheless, if the translation of this text into the Czech language is based on the reproduction principle so the Czech readers have for sure a big problem with understanding it. Thus, the text would not have the same effect on all readers from different cultures. That is one of the reasons why the emphasis is put more on the communicative principle. According to it, the translators have to follow the traditions and culture of the target culture as precisely as possible (Vilikovský 2002, 138-143).

The solution of this problem is the usage of the stylistic patterns already existing in the target culture. When the translator translates the literary work from the Romantic period, so he/she can use the works which were written in Romantic period in his/her culture. The difficulties come when there is no similar period in the target culture as in the source culture. In this case it is upon the translator if he/she decides to somehow create the traditions and the overall features of this period or if he/she follows contemporary perception and just tries to establish the impression of the earlier times (Vilikovský 2002, 138-143).

## 2 CULTURE

The Merriam-webster dictionary defines culture as:

- The beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time,
- a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc.,
- a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (Merriam-Webster).

When translator translates a piece of work, it is very important to take into account not only the grammatical, semantic features of the language but also the culture of the country to which language he/she is translating. He/she must adjust the source text to the religion, beliefs, history and all customs of the target audience.

### 2.1 American culture

It is very difficult to describe the American culture because there are so many states and also so many nationalities and each of them has a little bit different culture. However, because the practical part of this bachelor thesis deals with the differences in translation of the American sitcom from English to Czech language, it is appropriate to describe the environments in which the sitcom takes place. In America, there are many immigrants and that is why the American culture is also called the melting pot since this continent combines the customs from people from all over the world.

According to Althen, Americans are more open and also informal. This is caused mainly by their sense of equality due to which they usually treat everybody in the same way. For foreign visitors it may be a little confusing, especially in restaurants or hotels, where the waitress or receptionist is very friendly and informal and they are not used to this kind of behaviour on public places. They foreigners may have the feeling that the stuff is actually impolite or even rude to them (2002, 20)

Americans are also thought from their childhood that they are individuals and they have to be responsible for themselves. As Althen claims: “[...] Americans see themselves as individuals who are different from all other individuals [...]“. And also another writer Bill Bryson described the American’s individualism very clearly: “When you grow up in America you are inculcated from the earliest age with the belief—no, the understanding—that America is the richest and most powerful nation on earth because God likes us best. It

has the most perfect form of government, the most exciting sporting events, the tastiest food and amplest portions, the largest cars, most productive farms, the most devastating nuclear arsenal and the friendliest, most decent and most patriotic folks on earth. Countries just don't come any better" (Althen 2002, 28-31 ).

Another important thing for Americans is their privacy. They cannot understand people who actually do not want to be alone and they consider them weak and dependent on others. What proves this claim is that every child in America has usually his or her own room as soon as possible (Althen 2002, 46-47).

Americans are so confident about their behaviour and routines that they consider them to be the only right and normal ones. Hence, they do not connect the word custom with their own behaviour but according to their opinion, the customs are connected only with people from other countries. Even though it is impossible to name all American customs, the writer Althen provides a brief list of behaviour which we should avoid in order to get on well with Americans:

- be punctual,
- if you have made an appointment with somebody, you have to keep it,
- treat waitresses, taxi drivers and other service people in a polite way,
- when you are standing and talking with an American, you should stay at least an arm's length away because they like to keep their personal space (2002, 106-107).

### 3 TRANSLATING THE HUMOUR

Since the analyzed material of this thesis is based on humour and entertaining one-liners and situations it is necessary to explain the term humour itself and also to uncover some methods to translate it well.

Humour can be defined in many ways, for example:

- the quality of being amusing or comic,
- the ability to express humour or amuse other people
- a mood or state of mind, etc. (Oxford Dictionaries).

However, what some people find very amusing, somebody else can find boring, uninteresting, inappropriate or even rude. It is influenced by many factors, especially cultural, historical, geographical background. People who laugh at something identical are usually from the same country or they are of the same religion, nationality or simply have something in common.

To translate the humour for example in sitcoms must be for the translator very difficult, demanding and time consuming task, which requires huge amount of creativity. First, the translator must understand the humoristic parts in the source text, otherwise it would be impossible to translate it. After he/she identifies the humorous elements, the other task is to transfer these parts into the target language in order to preserve the humour of the text. There is one thing, which could be helpful during translating sitcoms – canned laughter, which cannot be absent in any sitcom. It is truth that it can help the translator to identify the humorous part but on the other hand he/she is obliged by this to include humorous translation exactly on this place. It means that there is no possibility for him/her to use the translation method called compensation elsewhere (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007, 215-216).

#### 3.1 The types of jokes

The jokes can be divided into several categories. According to Díaz Cintas and Remael, there are seven types of them:

- **International or bi-national jokes:** the referents of these jokes are well-known in all over the world, so they are usually film stars, some famous places that everybody knows or some behavioural norms which are internationally recognizable.

- **Jokes referring to national culture or institution:** these jokes include references that are unknown to target culture. The jokes can be for example about current political issue in the country, so the translator should come up with some similar issue in the target culture in order to the target audience understand the joke.
- **Jokes reflecting a community's sense of humour:** when translating this type of jokes, the knowledge of the source culture is more important than the source language itself because these jokes are usually inspired by some historical or political events that many foreigners do not even know about.
- **Language-dependent jokes:** these jokes cannot be translated literally because their point is in the playing with language including for example morphology and syntax.
- **Visual jokes:** the translator does not have to be bothered by these jokes because they are connected mainly with the gestures of the actors and their body language which is, more or less, international.
- **Aural jokes:** these jokes also do not require translation because they are based on noises and metalinguistic characteristics of speech.
- **Complex jokes:** they are the combination of two or more types stated above and from the point of view of difficulty are very tough propositions for the translator (2007, 217-228).



## 4 SUBTITLES

The subtitles started to arise and develop almost immediately after the invention of films. The process began with so called intertitles which were texts printed on the paper, filmed and placed between sequences of the film. However, this was possible only in the case of silent films. Since the invention of sound films, the intertitles were useless and had to be replaced by subtitles, more or less, as they are known today. The subtitling developed very quickly due to the fact that to create subtitles was considerably cheaper than dubbing. The methods of creating subtitles progressed from optical method, subtitling using mechanical and thermal processes, the chemical process to the laser subtitling. Nowadays, the process is much easier thanks to computerization (Fong and Au 2009, 3-11).

### 4.1 Subtitling versus Dubbing

Even though dubbing and subtitling are connected with the translation of the same source text, there are linguistic contrasts between them. Whereas subtitles display an over-representation of the features of the source language, the dubbing does not do that. According to Fong and Au, the dubbing, in contrast to the subtitles, tries to adjust the translated film to the target culture and to possess more target-language-specific features. Subtitles are also constrained by time and space, hence the condensation and ellipsis techniques are often used. Because of that, the subtitling is sometimes called “the defective translation” since the subtitles cannot often fully reproduce the content of the source text (Fong and Au 2009, 63-66).

Another considerable difference between dubbing and subtitling is that through the subtitles is more difficult to express emotions and feelings that can be very well expressed by pitch, tone or rhythm in the spoken form. Nevertheless, there is a possibility to reproduce these features also in the written form but it is more strenuous. Fong and Au state the example, that when there is a rude character in the film, so it is very important to preserve his rude and impolite expressing, especially in the case of the subtitling (Fong and Au 2009, 95-98).

## **II. ANALYSIS**

## 5 ANALYZED MATERIAL

The analyzed material is the American television sitcom *Friends*. It was created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman and it was aired for the first time on September 22, 1994 on NBC. The sitcom consists of ten seasons and there are from 18 to 25 episodes in each of them. *Friends* were broadcasted in many countries and were translated into many languages, including Czech. The differences between the English and Czech versions of the sitcom will be analyzed in the practical part of this bachelor thesis.

The whole sitcom is about the lives of six people, friends Monica Geller, Rachel Green, Phoebe Buffay, Chandler Bing, Ross Geller and Joey Tribbiani, who live in Manhattan. In each episode people can watch their problems either with work, family or their girlfriends and boyfriends. Monica Geller has always wanted to work as a chef and her dream has eventually come true. She is very bossy, neat, competitive and punctilious woman and she is very often driving her friends mad by these annoying personality traits. In the seventh season she gets married with her long-time friend Chandler Bing. Rachel Green represents in the sitcom the “very beautiful but less intelligent” character. In the first episode she was to marry a man but she found out that she did not want to get married and escaped from the wedding. Immediately after that she started to live with Monica and had to learn what it is like when her father did not pay all her bills anymore. She was working as a waitress in a café Central Perk, where friends spend all their free time, just sitting, drinking coffee and talking together. After breaking up couple of times, she finally gets married with Ross and in the eighth season their daughter Emma is brought into the world. Phoebe Buffay is a vegetarian and very eccentric masseuse who spends the most of her time playing the guitar and singing quirky songs, which she writes on her own. She had very tough childhood since her mother had committed suicide and she lived on the street. In the season ten she gets married with Mike Hannigan. Chandler Bing is the funniest character of the sitcom who always knows what to say. His humor is usually very ironic and his friends are due to that sometimes angry with him. He had problems to find a woman and people even often thought that he was a gay. However, everything gets better when he marries Monica and when they adopt two babies together. Ross Geller is Monica’s brother and he has been in love with Rachel since they were on high school. He works as a paleontologist and very often bores everyone with his uninteresting experiences from the museum where he works. He is familiar for his numerous divorces which are the source of humor throughout the all series. The last character is Joey Tribbiani who works as an actor.

However, he is usually without the job as he is not very good. He is a womanizer who changes girls one after another. In spite of that, he is very nice, caring and good-hearted.

This bachelor thesis tries to analyze particular episodes in order to discover the differences between the source English language and the target Czech language. The aim is to find out how the translation into another language can influence the overall structure of the sitcom.

The analyzed episodes are:

S01E12 The One with the Dozen Lasagnas

S02E20 The One Where Old Yeller Dies

S03E01 The One with the Princess Leia Fantasy

S04E16 The One with the Fake Party

S05E16 The One with the Cop

S06E09 The One Where Ross Got High

S07E11 The One with All the Cheesecakes

S08E06 The One with the Halloween Party

S08E14 The One with the Secret Closet

S08E20 The One with the Baby Shower

S09E07 The One with Ross's Inappropriate Song

S09E18 The One with the Lottery

S10E08 The One with the late Thanksgiving

S10E13 The One Where Joey Speaks French

## 6 THE METHODS

This bachelor thesis deals with the consequences of the translation of the sitcom into another language, namely from English to Czech. Translation of the analyzed American sitcom *Friends* is rather complicated because the source culture is very distinct from the target culture. Comparing these two cultures, there can be found many differences in the politics, religion, art, or simply in the way people of the discussed cultures live their ordinary lives.

This sitcom is full of jokes, sayings and names of famous people who are typical for the American culture. Nevertheless, the Czech audience is not usually familiar with them. And this is the reason why the jokes should be always adapted to the Czech culture to make the target audience understand the situations. However, this requirement is not fulfilled in this sitcom very often. There appear especially names of people who are well-known in America but not in the Czech Republic. These names are not usually replaced by some equivalent which would be clear for the Czech audience so the target audience has to sometimes deduce what the characters are talking about just from the situation they are in or they are talking about.

Throughout the series, there are clearly visible some of the translation approaches which were described in the theoretical part as for example calque (*Thanksgiving Day* translated as *Den díkuvzdání*), transcription (the Phoebe's surname *Buffay* is changed into *Bufetová*) or adaptation (when Ross comments on Rachel's badly done dessert he says: "*It tastes like feet.*" and this sentence is translated as: "*Chce se mi zvracet.*" because this comparison is not used in the Czech language).

The partial translation was also described in the first part of this thesis and it says that the languages are different from particular points of view, for instance from formal when the English multi-word expression is very often replaced by Czech one-word expression (*the smelly cat* translated into Czech as *smrad'och*). Or the languages can differ from the pragmatic point of view which is based on the fact that the knowledge of the source and target audience is not the same. The translator can then use the explaining transcription (*cheesecake* translated as *tvarohový dort* or children at Halloween were knocking on the door and saying "*trick or treat*" in English whereas "*koledníci*" in Czech because this festival and the customs connected with it are not as known in the Czech Republic as they are in English speaking countries). Another option for the translator in the

case of information which is not known in the target language is to omit it completely (*the Szechuan Dragon* translated as *čínská restaurace*).

## 7 THE ANALYSIS

Since this bachelor thesis deals with the cultural differences and how they influence the translation of sitcoms, fourteen episodes were analyzed in order to compare the Czech and American version of each. As has been mentioned in the theoretical part, American and Czech cultures are very distinct and because of that the translation of the American sitcom into Czech language must be very demanding. Particularly during translating the analyzed sitcom *Friends*, the translators had to deal with these problems that will be described and clearly exemplified:

- The problem with different well-known names,
- the problem with different customs,
- the problem with less known or used word expressions,
- the problem with different opinions and prejudices.

### 7.1 The problem with different well-known names

A problem when translating the sitcom is translating the names. Because the names of people, places or films which are very well-known for the American audience can be unknown for the Czech audience. The translators have several options how to deal with this phenomenon. They can either preserve the name with no change, add some information which would give the Czech audience some hint to about the name, omit it completely when it does not change the meaning or substitute it with the name from the similar field which is better known to the Czech culture. In *Friends*, there can be found all of these solutions:

- (1) Guess who is coming for the dinner. (Monica)
- (2) Sidney Poitier? (Chandler)
  - (1a) Hádej kdo přijde na večeři. (Monica)
  - (2a) Sidney Poitier? (Chandler)<sup>1</sup>

Chandler's reply (2,2a) is Sidney Poitier who is an American actor and one of his films is called *Guess who's coming to dinner*. So Chandler actually alludes to this film which is famous in America but may not be well known in the Czech Republic. Since the Czech

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers mean the English version and the numbers with letters the Czech version

audience probably does not know what this film is about and therefore would not understand why Chandler's allusion is humorous, I think it would be probably better to substitute the name of Sidney Poitier with some famous person who is connected with cooking and who is known in the Czech Republic.

(1) ...but then Jacques Cousteau came and kicked his ass for betraying me.

(Phoebe)

(1a)...ale pak přišel Jacques Cousteau a nabančil mu, že mě zradil. (Phoebe)

Phoebe tells Rachel about her dream with Jacque Cousteau, French naval officer, explorer and scientist who studied the sea. However, this man is not very well known by the Czech audience but it was possible to preserve his name in the text because it is not so important to know who he was to understand the dialogue between Phoebe and Rachel.

(1) ...that Elton John wrote for, um, that guy on *Who's the boss*. (Phoebe)

(2) What song is that? (Rachel)

(3) Hold me close, young Tony Danza. (Phoebe)

(1a) Já bych řekla, že eta, kterou Elton John složil pro toho svýho zajocha.

(Phoebe)

(2a) Co je to za písničku? (Rachel)

(3a) Stiskni mě, sladký Tony Zajdo! (Phoebe)

The translators have decided to use substitution and omission in this conversation. They completely omitted the name of the American sitcom *Who's the boss*, which was broadcasted from 1984 to 1992, and whose main character was Tony Danza, who is mentioned by Phoebe. It was a reasonable decision because this sitcom has never been broadcasted in the Czech Republic. Phoebe also changes the name of the Elton John's song which is actually called *Hold me closer, tiny dancer*. In the Czech version the translators have used the phrase *sladký Tony Zajdo* to keep the impression of mixed up name of the song which was probably originally called *sladký tóny zajdou*.

(1) Look who I found standing outside the Szechuan Dragon. (Ross)

(1a) Podívejte, koho jsem našel před čínskou restaurací. (Ross)

This is the example of omission and explicitation. The original name of the restaurant is omitted and replaced by more understandable one. If the Czech translators had used the



literal translation it could have been quite confusing for the Czech audience and they would not have probably realized that Ross is talking about the restaurant at all.

- (1) And by the way there is no Count Rushmore. (Chandler)
- (2) Then who's the guy that painted the faces on the mountain? (Joey)
- (1a) Jo a mimochodem není žádný Count Rushmore. (Chandler)
- (2a) Jo? A kdo vytesal do skály prezidenty? (Joey)

Joey is watching the competition in the television and the answer on the question should be Mount Rushmore but Joey claims it is Count Rushmore. First, Chandler does not tell him that he is wrong but when Joey makes him angry he tells him. Mount Rushmore is a famous sculpture of the heads of four presidents of United States, carved into the mountain. The American version counts with the fact that the audience is familiar with the famous sculpture and hence understands immediately that Joey, by contrast, does not know anything about it. On the other hand, the Czech version is more explanatory in order to give the Czech audience a little hint to comprehend what they are actually talking about.

- (1) He loves The Velveteen Rabbit. (Monica)
- (1a) Jako kluk měl rád Sametovýho Králíčka. (Monica)

Monica has bought Chandler the costume of the pink and white rabbit for the Halloween party and Chandler and also everybody else find it very ridiculous. Monica says that she has bought it because Chandler liked *The Velveteen Rabbit*, which is very popular book for children written by Margery Williams. However, this book is not very popular in the Czech Republic, where it was by the way translated as *Králíček Sameřáček*, and most people do not know it at all. Therefore, the Czech audience, in contrast to the American one, do probably not reveal the joke which is based on the fact that the real Velveteen Rabbit was brown and white and not pink and white as Chandler's costume.

- (1) Daddy made you laugh, huh? Well, daddy and Sir Mix-A-Lot. (Ross)
- (1a) Táta tě rozesmál, co? Teda, táta a jeho zpěv. (Ross)

In the Czech version, Sir Mix-A-Lot is completely omitted because he is not very known in the Czech Republic. He is an American rapper whose most famous song is *Baby Got Back*. This song appeared also in Friends when Ross sang it to his daughter Emma to make her laugh. The name of the song is translated into Czech as *Prdelatá holka* and the words of it are translated mostly literally with the use of transposition.

(1) They live on the Upper East Side on Park Avenue. (Phoebe)

(1a) Bydlej v Upper East Side, já na Park Avenue. (Phoebe)

Phoebe says it to Monica and Rachel because she is very nervous about visiting the parents of her boyfriend Mike, who are very rich. The Upper East Side on Park Avenue is one of the most affluent neighbourhoods in New York City. Nevertheless, the majority of the Czech audience is not familiar with the neighbourhoods in the United States so it is very probable that they would not deduce from Phoebe's sentence that Mike's parents are rich. From that reason the Czech version selects the comparison which helps people to understand that there is some difference between the standard of living of Phoebe and Mike's parents.

(1) Not to sound too Florence Henderson but dinner's on the table. (Monica)

(1a) Drahoušku, nechci tě rušit od zábavy, ale večeře je na stole. (Monica)

The name of Florence Henderson is left out in the Czech version of the sitcom. She is an American actress and singer but she is best known for hosting several cooking shows. The reason why she was not mentioned in the Czech version is that she is not very known in the Czech Republic. The other solution would be again to replace her name by the name of some woman who is connected with cooking shows and who the Czech audience is familiar with.

(1) Do you know Sipowitz? (Phoebe)

(2) Sipowitz? I don't think so. (Gary)

(3) Yeah. Sipowitz. Big guy. Kind of bald...His partner just died. (Phoebe)

(4) I'm sure Sipowitz will be alright. I heard that kid from Silver Spoons is really good. (Gary)

(1a) Znáte třeba Sipowitze? (Phoebe)

(2a) Sipowitze? Ne, myslím, že ne. (Gary)

(3a) Jo, Sipowitz. Velkej, malá pleš...Jeho parták zemřel. (Phoebe)

(4a) Nebojte se o Sipowitze. V další epizodě má dostat novýho partáka. (Gary)

In this dialogue is referred to the famous police detective Andy Sipowitz, the main character of *NYPD Blue*. *The Silver Spoons* is an American sitcom about spoiled rich kid. Neither of these sitcoms has not been broadcasted in the Czech Republic, so the names of the characters are unfamiliar for the Czech audience which also cannot know that when

Sipowitz's partner died, the character from *the Silver Spoons* replaced him and became Sipowitz's new partner. By using the sentence *V další epizodě má dostat nového partáka*, the translators wanted to demonstrate that Phoebe and Gary are talking about some serial.

## 7.2 The problem with different customs

The festival which is celebrated very often during the episodes is the Thanksgiving Day. It is a national holiday celebrated on fourth Thursday of November as the reminder of Indians who helped the Puritans with harvest when they settled down in the New World. This holiday is very well known by all the Americans but the Czech audience may not be familiar with it. Most of them probably know the main idea of this festival but they do not know from what specific reason it is celebrated. Hence, the American (source) audience understands perfectly all the hints and jokes about Thanksgiving, whereas the Czech (target) audience could have more difficulties to notice and catch on to everything. There are a lot of phrases, sentences and dialogues about this festival which might confuse the Czech audience, for example:

(1) : „...the Indians taught the Pilgrims what it meant to be hot in the New World”.

(Joey)

(1a) “...a pak ti Indiáni ukázali otcům poutníkům jak uměj hopsat kolem ohně”.

(Joey)

For audience that is completely agreeable to the Thanksgiving Day and everything related to this festival must be this quote funnier than for the Czech audience that does not celebrate it. Joey told this sentence when he was looking for an excuse why he want rather spend the Thanksgiving Day with beautiful dancers than with his friends. Czech translators relied on the fact that the girls are dancers and due to that they chose the phrase “hopsat kolem ohně”.

Another popular American festival which is not celebrated in the Czech Republic is Halloween. This festival is celebrated on 31<sup>st</sup> October, when children are dressed up like various, usually scary creatures as was demonstrated in the sitcom where children's costumes were for example a witch, a ballet dancer or a cowboy. They go from one house to the other and they say “Trick or treat”. If people do not give them some sweets, they play some trick on them. Since the Czech audience is not used to this kind of festival, there is

no expression for “trick or treat” in the Czech language. Hence, the Czech translators substituted this expression by simple word “koledníci”.

The difference in American and Czech metric system must be also dealt with when translating anything from source American into target Czech culture. However, concerning this particular sitcom, this problem was not always taken into consideration. For example when Monica gives a lasagne to Paolo and she says:

(1) Heat it on 375°. (Monica)

(1a) Ohřej to na 375°. (Monica)

As visible, the numbers are the same but the problem is that Americans use the degrees Fahrenheit and Czechs use the degrees Celsius. It follows that the Czech translation should have been not 375° but 190°.

Some different types of competitions are also held in America than in the Czech Republic. In the episode The One with the Late Thanksgiving, Rachel and Phoebe enrol Rachel’s daughter Emma into a baby pageant. It is a beauty contest in which the small babies compete with each other and the most beautiful wins. This type of competition is very popular in America and many mothers enrol their children. However, it is rather unknown and also not accepted in the Czech Republic. In the same episode friends mention the competition in spelling which is another type of competition very popular in America but not in the Czech Republic. The reason is that English language, unlike the Czech language, is difficult from the point of view of spelling, so people can compete in it.

### **7.3 The problem with less known or used word expressions**

There are some word expressions in English that do not have the equivalent in Czech. In this case, some translation approaches as calque or transcription cannot be used and must be chosen the different ones. The most preferable in this situation is for instance adaptation or explicitation. This problem is connected especially with proverbs, sayings, idioms and other fixed expressions. Particularly in Friends, the translators solved it by using the Czech word expressions which would be used in given situations.

Americans are used to shorten their first names just as the Czechs are. However, Czechs do not shorten foreign names, at least in this sitcom. In the Czech version the names of all friends are always in the full form, so in Czech language, they never call Monica Mon, Rachel Rach, Phoebe Phoebes or Chandler Chan.

As stated above, there are many expressions in English whose literal translation into Czech would not make a sense at all and without the knowledge about the context the translators would be lost. Many of them can be found in Friends:

(1) It tastes like feet. (Ross)

(1a) Je mi z toho špatně. (Ross)

This sentence is said by Ross after he had to eat the dessert which Rachel had prepared for them on the Thanksgiving Day. She wanted to make traditional English trifle but she the pages of a cookbook glued together and she was making half the trifle and half the shepherd's pie.

(1) Stop yanking me... (Joey)

(1a) Nedělej ze mě vola. (Joey)

The word yank is a synonym of a word jerk but Joey changed this noun into the verb. And that is the reason, why this sentence is funny. It would be very difficult to create the verb for example from the Czech word *viř*, *blbec* or another swearword. Hence, the translators have solved it by using the transposition.

(1) Listen to the plinky – plunky music. (Phoebe)

(1a) Poslouchej hajuli – bajuli muziku. (Phoebe)

Phoebe used this expression when she tried to put Monica to sleep because she was shattered after the breakup with Richard. The expression plinky – plunky music does not exist in English language and neither does hajuli – bajuli in Czech. The translators had to create such an expression that would fit into the given context.

(1) What about the part where he got rabies? (Monica)

(2) He doesn't get rabies, he gets babies. (Phoebe)

(1a) A co ta část, kdy dostane psinku? (Monica)

(2a) Neříká se psinka, ale fenka. (Phoebe)

Monica and others are watching the film called *The Old Yeller* which was in the sitcom translated into Czech as *Věrný Rek*. When Phoebe came into the room she was very surprised that everybody was so sad while watching it and it showed up that she had never seen the film until the end. The sentences exemplified above have very different meanings (rabies is different illness than distemper and to get babies or a bitch is also a difference) but on the other hand their dissimilarity does not influence the understanding of the

situation in which they are used. The aim of the translators was obviously to preserve the image of the conversation so in the end only thing that is important is the fact that *psinka* and *fenka* rhyme equally as *rabies* and *babies*.

(1) So, what's the final head count on my baby shower? (Rachel)

(1a) Takže, kolik lidí přijde vybavit mé miminko? (Rachel)

It is very common to organize so called baby showers which are actually parties where the friends of mother of the baby give her the gifts for the baby. There is no expression for this event in the Czech language because this type of parties is not very much held in the Czech Republic. And from that reason, the translators endeavoured to translate the expression in the explanatory and clear way. The baby shower is also included in the name of the whole episode (The One with the Baby Shower) which was simply translated as *Výbavička*.

#### 7.4 The problem with different opinions and prejudices

It is understandable that each nation has a little different opinion about other nations, particular occupations or types of people. Because those opinions differ so much, some jokes in American sitcom connected to it seem to the Czech audience very often incomprehensible.

Americans have for example different relationship with English people than Czechs. In many films and serials, including *Friends*, Americans make fun of England and especially of English accent. In the sitcom, when Ross goes out with Emily, who is from London, so always when is Chandler speaking with her he imitates her English accent. Of course, this cannot be visible in the Czech translation. Although, not even the Czech viewers cannot overlook Chandler's question in the café if anyone wants more tea (they drink always coffee) when Emily is there, too. And when Rachel made a traditional English trifle and she mixed together jam, bananas and sponge fingers with beef and they asked her if she had not considered it strange, she replied:

(1) Well, there's minced meat pie. That's an English dessert. These people just put very strange things in their food. (Rachel)

(1a) Když v Anglii dělají Vánoční pudink s lojem a černým pivem, jsou schopni smíchat prakticky cokoli. (Rachel)

Rachel is actually saying that it did not seem strange to her because there are a lot of English recipes that are strange on purpose.

(1) Why would a cop come in here? They don't serve doughnuts. (Chandler)

(1a) Proč by sem ale polda chodil? Na koblihy? (Chandler)

The Americans' typical picture of policeman almost always includes not very this man holding a coffee and mainly some doughnuts. So it was not surprising when Chandler's first thought when he heard about a police badge were the doughnuts. Same question actually asked also Ross, when he came later. In the end of the episode Gary, the policeman whose badge friends had found in the café, said that he was going there because of their good doughnuts.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to find out to which extent the cultural differences can influence the translation of the sitcoms, namely the American sitcom *Friends*. Even though the cultures are nowadays thanks to globalization closer and closer, there are still many values and customs which are typical for one culture but which are completely unknown or even unacceptable for the other one. Therefore, the translators should try to adjust the translated sitcom to the target culture as much as possible. As described in the fourth chapter about the differences between dubbing and subtitles, it is easier to adapt the sitcom to the target culture by using dubbing which gives the translators more possibilities to avoid the expressions, which may be typical for the source culture but which are unknown for the target culture, and to replace them by the expressions which the target audience is familiar with.

I had the opportunity to compare the dubbed and the subtitled versions of the analyzed sitcom and my personal findings correspond with the theory stated by Fong and Au in their book *Dubbing and Subtitling in a World Context*. The dubbed version was much more understandable and therefore also entertaining for the Czech audience than the version with subtitles. For example, when Ross comments on Rachel's spoiled trifle, he says "*It tastes like feet*", in the dubbed version it was translated as "*Je mi z toho špatně*", whereas subtitled version used the literal translation "*Chutná to jak nohy*". However, this saying is not used in the Czech language at all.

During analyzing the individual episodes, I found out that the cultural differences are very often obvious and that many jokes, hints and expressions are culture-specific, hence highly demanding for translation. In order to make these differences well arranged, the practical part is divided into four subchapters according to the types of problems, the translators had to deal with during translating this sitcom. Each problem was properly described and accompanied with several examples from the analyzed sitcom. The most illustrations can be found to the first subchapter which deals with the problem with different well-known names. The reason is that, in every culture, there are many names of famous people, places, films or fictitious characters which are less known or even completely unknown in other cultures. In my opinion, translators usually did great job at translating this sitcom but some names could have been omitted or replaced to make it more understandable for the Czech audience. The other subchapters deal with the problem with different customs, of which number is decreasing thanks to the spreading of American



culture into the whole world, less known or used expressions and different opinions and prejudices, especially about the other cultures and specific occupations.

To conclude this thesis, when people from one culture want to understand perfectly all the expressions, hints, jokes and conversations from the foreign sitcom or another film genre, to know the particular foreign language is not enough. First of all, they should have at least the background knowledge about the history and culture of the sitcom's place of origin.

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