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Ethnolinguistics of Translating Jokes. Six Questions

Etnolingvistika prevođenja viceva. Šest pitanja

Abstract

This paper will consider six fundamental questions that can be asked when jokes are compared and contrasted across languages or translated.

1. What jokes are going global?
2. How are parodies part of cultural rivalry and competition?
3. Can we compare parodies with mean jokes?
4. What jokes don't translate?
5. Who laughs at Czech jokes?
6. Who laughs at Croatian jokes?

Discussing these questions should enable us to consider the targets of jokes, the cultural narratives that underpin them, and the strategies and logics behind them. It will encourage us to ask what jokes manage to migrate from one context to another, and what cultural and linguistic factors come into play when jokes go out of fashion or prove impossible to translate.

Keywords: Croatian, Czech, humour, jokes, parody, targets, translating.

Sažetak

Ovaj će rad razmotriti šest temeljnih pitanja koja se mogu postaviti prilikom usporedbe i kontrastiranja viceva između jezika ili njihova prevođenja.

1. Koji vicevi postaju globalni?
2. Kako su parodije dio kulturnog rivalstva i natjecanja?
3. Možemo li usporediti parodije sa zlobnim šalama?
4. Koji se vicevi ne mogu prevesti?
5. Tko se smije češkim vicevima?
6. Tko se smije hrvatskim vicevima?

Rasprava o ovim pitanjima omogućit će nam da razmotrimo mete viceva, kulturne narative koji ih podupiru te strategije i logike koje stoje iza njih. Također će nas potaknuti da razmislimo koji se vicevi uspješno prenose iz jednog konteksta u drugi, kao i koje kulturne i jezične čimbenike valja uzeti u obzir kada vicevi izlaze iz mode ili postaju neprevodivi.

Ključne riječi: hrvatski, češki, humor, vicevi, parodija, mete, prevođenje

World Humour and Jokes Going Global

In April 2025, Chongqing, otherwise known as the "Chinese Trump" started making a name for himself as his TikTok and YouTube videos parodying the US President, Donald Trump, went viral (Chongqing 2025a, 2025b). Chongqing's parodies were remarkable for two reasons. They demonstrate that Chinese citizens could imitate Donald Trump's intonation, his tendency to repeat simple key phrases as a form of emphasis, his moralistic rhetoric, and especially his tendency to affirm that other countries were taking advantage of him and of America. But more importantly, they set these parodies in familiar Chinese city-settings and used a mixture of English and Mandarin Chinese. This created the "Chinese Trump" that argued over how much hot pot he was entitled to and who should give him the lion's share. This kind of satire suggests that something in laughter, jokes and humour is "going global". And what is it exactly?

In one sense, for Western viewers, and anglophones in general, Chongqing had simply mastered the parody of Trump's style of rhetoric that

Saturday Night Live (SNL) had been perfecting since 2016 with various impersonators of the US President, as can be seen in the SNL public confrontational debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump (SNL 2016a). But the popularity of Chongqing's parodies has to be understood within the world context of 2025 in which the Trump Administration was imposing tariffs on imports to the US, which some argued would upset the global economy, and in the context of China where the imposed tariffs were particularly harsh. Vice President Vance's comments on "Chinese peasants", which CNN (CNN 2025) alleged left Vance caught in a "firestorm", will have done little to soften the blow. Chongqing's satire can be seen as a reaction, a counterattack. The question is then, how global stories and incidents are perceived and integrated, then satirised or parodied within specific linguistic and cultural contexts. Parodies and jokes may be "going global", but does that make laughter, humour or wordplay any less bound to culture and language?

In the present volume, the various contributors will help construct a complex and subtle model of what the Slavs laugh at. This will no doubt produce a kaleidoscope of different perspectives and sensibilities, very different from the stereotypical representations of Slavs in Western media and in Anglophone humour. This chapter will consider a selection of Slovenian, Croatian and Czech jokes, but it will principally restrict itself to raising six more general questions about the nature of jokes and the way they are appreciated or perceived across cultures. Which jokes are translated, and which jokes ultimately prove incomprehensible to audiences outside of the nations in which they are told? What cultures are exporting their humour, and when their jokes, their parodies and satires go global, what do we need to understand about the way other cultures respond to them? By raising and the following six questions and briefly responding to them, we should be able to gain a greater understanding of the kinds of jokes that Slavs and other peoples laugh at.

1. What jokes are going global?
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3. Can we compare parodies with mean jokes?
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Question One: What jokes are going global?

Chongqing's Chinese Trump and the SNL parodies are evidence that many targets of jokes are being shared among cultures around the world. Initially, Saturday Night Live invited Donald Trump to participate in poking fun at himself (SNL 2016b), and although the video is not something that has taken on, it does demonstrate the complex way targets are induced to play along with the parodies that arguably enhance them and further establish their popularity. But Americans are not the only targets of these parodies and jokes. SNL posted a video on YouTube (SNL 2019) parodying mocking Germany' Chancellor, Angela Merkel, Canada's President, Justin Trudeau, France's President, Emmanuel Macron, Britain's Prime Mister, Boris Johnson, along with President Donald Trump, and other less well-known European presidents. At one level, this can be seen as a universal strategy of pulling down the high and mighty.

However, at the same time, the parody, which is set in a fictitious Nato Cafeteria, displayed a curious power struggle between, "the cool guys", Macron, Trudeau and Johnson, and the others, the Presidents of Estonia and Romania who were portrayed as ridiculous, sycophantic minor statesmen in awe of the "cool guys". In the parody, Merkel gets included and Trump gets excluded as "the cool guys" play their childish playground games. And this reveals something of the sovereign distain of the major actors of international debates for the minor players of the EU who would certainly be unlikely to find such parodies either accurate or amusing. This kind of parody both reveals and reinforces stereotypes and cultural narratives that are recognized and enjoyed by Anglo-American audiences.

Throughout the 2010s and up to this day, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, has been regularly parodied (SNL 2017, SNL 2019b). Sometimes the Russian President is represented as a KGB spy. Often, he is played bare-chested (by actors like Beck Bennet, who are clearly thirty years younger than the Russian President). But one thing is constant; all the Russians have a very thick Slavic accent and tend to express themselves bluntly and brutally, whether they are secretaries, civil servants, army officers or politicians. Satire likes stereotypes not sociolects or idiolects; traits are selected and highlighted to incarnate the supposed

identity and character of the nation. These SNL sketches clearly consolidate the kind of stereotypes about Russians that Hollywood has promoted and that actors like the Glaswegian, Robbie Coltrane, showcased while he was acting as a post-Perestroika Russian Mafia boss, opposite Pierce Brosnan in the James Bond movie, *Golden Eye* that came out in 1995 (Movie Clip Microcosm 2023).

In this sense, such parodies tend to consolidate a certain "slavophobia" in Western cultures. Westeners tend to suppose that they have a monopoly on culture and cultivation, finesse and fine feelings, all of which are absent in the stereotypes of Russians who are often portrayed paradoxically as being blunt, sly and manipulative. This is part of an ongoing narrative that can easily be found in cartoons using any search engine such as Google or Bing to find satires of Trump and Putin. A Bing search, for example (Bing 2025) depicted President Putin, playing the balalaika while Trump dances like a Cossack for him. In another cartoon, Putin is holding Trump's tie. Others depict an enamoured Trump pleased that his Russian counterpart understands him ("gets him"), while Putin understands he has manipulated his counterpart ("I've got him"). And, once more, a bare-chested giant Putin is portrayed dragging around a defenceless Trump.

Given the war in Ukraine, such stereotypes may not seem particularly offensive to some people, but the Russian stereotypes are clearly Slavic stereotypes, and they extend to the Slovenians the Serbians and any other Slavic people. Melania jokes were popular throughout Donald Trump's first presidency. These jokes incessantly presented the First Lady of the US as a gold-digging go-getter of little moral virtue (see Upjokes or Jokojokes), without culture or sophistication. The SNL satires of Melania Trump (SNL 2016c) predictably do not represent her as an intelligent polyglot, but rather as a silly woman with a heavy Slavic accent, a girl from a poor Eastern country who marries her husband to get a Green Card and working papers.

French students and students of English general, in my experience, do not find these parodies amusing. Having an accent is part of learning a language, and if such parodies fall flat for students, it is perhaps because language-learners realize that the people that are parodying accents don't tend to learn foreign languages and certainly do not master them as they do. It should be clear therefore that while these narratives about Trump,

and other world leaders, about his wife and Slavs in general are gaining viewers around the world, viewers tend to react differently according to their own sensibilities and understandings and above all according to their cultural perspectives.

Obviously, much humour is translated today. Blonde jokes were going global ten or twenty years ago. And Humour Studies specialists have commented on the flexible way they infiltrate and colonize the comic sensibilities of very different nations (see Davies 2011: 69–76, 112; on French, Polish and Hungarian jokes). Although, few young people tend to tell such jokes today, they do appear in Czech joke books and in Croatian joke books such as *Plavuše* edited by Frančišković in Rijeka in 2013. Communist jokes became popular in the 1990s and 2000s and formed part of a nostalgia that was still going strong in the 2010s; in France (Vernet 2008), in the UK (Lewis 2008) in Croatia (Božić 2013), and in the Czech Republic (Šebesta 2017; Nejedlý 2018). Communist jokes now form part of World Culture. But paradoxically few of the communist jokes survived. Most of those that came to take on meaning in something approaching a universal way tend to be reductive and dismissive of both the economic and historical realities of socialist regimes. The jokes and the jokers tend to demonstrate no real curiosity about the specific cultures and the circumstances of individuals living in Socialist societies. Above all the complex variety of perspectives that produced those jokes and made them funny for citizens living under communism seems to have been forgotten or excluded.

Increasingly, with the Internet, memes go global, and they go global with a rapidity and complexity that is difficult to track despite the efforts of enlightened researchers that are trying to keep up with this form of humour such as Eric Weitz (2017) in his chapter on Online and Internet Humor published in The Routledge handbook of language and humor, edited by Salvatore Attardo. Ultimately, with all these forms of online parodies and jokes, there is an element of mystery. The jokes may be simple, but what pleases, amuses and makes people laugh is somewhat unpredictable. We may import jokes from abroad, but how we process and appreciate them depends on the culture and the sensibilities of individuals.

Question Two: How are parodies part of cultural rivalry and competition?

Rivalry works at all levels, among people, in schools and offices, neighbourhoods and regions, and of course among nations. Blondes would appear to be the targets of pop singer parodies on TikTok and YouTube. With five million views on YouTube, the American singer, Ke$a (2010), is an obvious target. Almost immediately, the parody artists profit from the promotion of the songs to hype their parodies. The parodies of Ke$a, like one done by Key of Awesome parody (updated on YouTube in 2012), were soon mocking the trashy, drunken image of the binge-drinking teenager that stays up all night, sleeps in the bath, and brushes her teeth with Jack Daniels Bourbon whiskey. But the humorous twist came in unmasking the profit-motive behind this display of rebellion portrayed by artists and promoted by the music industry to hype their songs as commodities with a teenage target market. Artists that alternate between being blondes and brunettes, such as Shakira and Mylie Cyrus are often imitated and cruelly parodied. Katy Perry parodies demonstrate that dark-haired female artists do not escape parodies. A YouTube video transformed Katy Perry's song video, *Dark Horse*, into a parody of the singer, her husband at the time, Russel Brand, and their marital disputes (Baker 2014). And yet, some brunettes such as the contemporary Anglo-Albanian singer, Dua Lipa, appear to have defied caricatures. Why this is, remains unclear.

However, a clear distinction must be made between Americans parodying their own artists and Americans parodying foreign artists. The humour in mocking their own artists depends on highlighting the singer's extravagant idiosyncrasies, the way they show off and their attempts to move or seduce their spectators. On the other hand, the kind of ridicule that comes into play when foreign artists are parodied is different in nature. Some parodies, such as the one of Shakira and Rihanna's song *Can't remember to forget you* (2017), satirise, predictably but without undue cruelty, Shakira's scanty dress, her moves, her aggressive drumming and the fact that she is waiting for Rihanna to warm her up. On the other hand, the Mad TV satire of Shakira (Mad TV 2011) was much more of an attack on the "Bomba Latina" myth. Shakira's expert dancing was ridiculed and made

to look clumsy and insane as she shook her hips and crawled through mud in the sunset. Most of all her lyrics were made to sound incoherent and her accent was ridiculed. This was clearly an attempt to debunk a stereotype or fantasy that animates the American imagination of "sexy Latinas", in contrast to White Anglo-Saxon American beauties, expressing themselves in elegant and coherent English. Although the parody was "personal" it was clearly intended as a cultural statement and understood as an invitation to ridicule singers from Hispanic cultures.

Clearly, humour and jokes, satire and parodies work within cultural narratives. The Americans have their narratives, and they seek to export them. But part of the colonization of World Culture involves opposing Counter-Narratives. Ultimately, this is an American battle, because the "Bomba Latina" narrative is very much a home product of American culture in much the same way as stereotypes of French eroticism are a phenomenon celebrated by and exported by Anglo cultures. They are derived from the sexual tourism of the nineteenth and twenty century in Paris and wartime experiences of young allied soldiers following the liberation of France in 1918 and 1944 (see Davies 2011: 76–82). So, this cultural controversy can be seen as an attempt to adjust the representations that have of their "Cultural Others". Curiously, both the Shakira parodies were commented by watchers, and the contents of their remarks were surprisingly similar, deeply appreciative and nostalgic. Viewers of both parodies suggested Shakira herself should watch them. Most, but not all, of the viewers were anglophones and almost everyone commented on the parodies in English, although one wrote in Portuguese commenting on the more respectful pastiche of Shakira and Rihanna.

Question Three: Can we compare parodies with mean jokes?

Judging from this, it would seem that cultural parodies seem to be accepted and even appreciated by fans of the artists themselves, who appear to assume that the singers could join them in laughing about their songs and their parodies. Is it fair to consider cruel parodies as a form of "Mean

Jokes"? It is first necessary to define our terms. It should prove useful to divide "Mean jokes" into three categories:

1. Many jokes that are marketed as "mean" turn out to be rather tame and inoffensive. The jokes on *The (mostly) simple life* website fall into this category. And books on Black humour or Dark Humour are often fairly inoffensive.
2. Some "Mean Jokes" are intended to provoke and offend, but the jokers usually intend to take as much as they give. They invite their targets to retort with equally offensive jokes. This is banter. Jokes about "yo Mom" in the US fall into this category. But so too does Coote's collection of mean jokes in his *The Seriously Rude Joke Book*, published in Queensland, Australia which upholds the tradition in democratic down-to-earth humour that is considered by many to be part of Australian culture.
3. The Mean Jokes found on the Reddit.com website, in Tibballs (2005), and in Tim Bradbury's *Seriously rude jokes for bad boys*, published in Berkshire, England in 2001, on the other hand, are clearly intended to be offensive. Their targets are denigrated and treated with contempt. These jokes revel in racism, sexism, and they represent the humiliation of women and minorities. They also tend to lack both novelty and subtlety. They are painfully predictable and need not be quoted here.

Does this classification help us interpret song parodies? On the whole, song parodies aim to please a wide variety of viewers, so most parodies tend to navigate between the first and the second categories, they can be provocative but are rarely dismissive. They succeed if they are fun. Some parodies do incline towards the third category at times and seem biting and cruel. But ultimately, parodies are part of the Music Business, and they do not intend to destroy or replace the artists that keep them in business. Parodies are creations, painstakingly crafted by talented artists who often see their interpretations as a form of pastiche, a tribute to those they mock.

Question Four: What jokes don't translate?

Over the last two decades, Humour Studies has made great progress in defining itself as a legitimate interdisciplinary subject with a rigorous definition of the joke (Attardo (ed.) 2017). It is a discipline in which the scripts or narratives (see Chłopicki 2017) are identified and analyzed. The sociological dimension of jokes is taken into account (Kuipers 2001, 2002). And over the past ten years, the transformation of jokes in online social media has been carefully studied (Chiaro 2018). This serves to demonstrate what we can share, what we can all understand about jokes, and what jokes can migrate from culture to culture. The cultural context and the socio-historical realities of jokes and the sensibilities of people, cultures and subcultures has tended to be downplayed in international discussions in English, however. And this introduces the test of translation.

The question of what jokes are translatable forces us to reconsider what we understand by "untranslatable". Translators tend to work within the logic of Biblical translation and literary translation. Both traditions exalt fidelity, precision and exhaustivity. Equivalence is the ultimate objective. But this is clearly impossible for many jokes. Moreover, is it essential? Do we need to find equivalents? And in laughter, isn't it true that context is just as important as content? On the one hand, jokes are not serious; they are neither words of wisdom nor works of great literary value. They are fun, and who is having fun is what comes first.

Perhaps the questions for translating jokes are different in nature. If this is so, jokers will ask themselves:

- Is this joke worth translating?
- Will it be perceived as amusing?
- Will it get a laugh?
- Does it surprise people or force them to think differently?
- Will it offend anyone?

Paradoxically, many offensive jokes never offend people because the people who tell such jokes tend to retreat into their own communities and do not wish to interact with or provoke their targets. Their targets belong to "them" in the "Us & Them" dynamics, and most of the people who enjoy revelling in their own prejudices feel little inclination to insult people

they dislike or disapprove of. They avoid them and avoid provoking them. For this reason, the most offensive jokes are rarely heard in public places, even in bars or other places where drinking is customary. This does make it all the more startling, however, to see offensive jokes in print in books or on online websites. Offensiveness is clearly a question of context. The constant recycling of videos that originate in one context and migrate to many others like TikTok videos and the *Saturday Night Live* sketches often appear obscure, incomprehensible, and at times offensive when they reappear in new contexts.

Perhaps two anecdotes will prove useful to illustrate the kinds of joking and sense of humour that appear incomprehensible or offensive. In Mostar in July 2022, in discussion with a Bosnian basketball player who had played internationally and travelled widely, the man affirmed that Germans and Austrians were fine people but had 'no sense of humour'. He quoted as proof of this the fact that some people had taken offence when he had once said hello by using a Hitler salute in a casual meeting with fellow players. I explained that the Germans were still sensitive about the war. But at this point the Bosnian took offence and reminded the Scottish academic who was explaining their perspective. He retorted 'We had a war too, you know!' Clearly, he felt that the wars of some nations become "sensitive subjects" while other wars and the sufferings of smaller nations are ignored or forgotten. Certainly, world culture tends to show more sympathy for the sufferings of their citizens when their narratives can be exported. America movies such as Rambo and series such as Homeland, for example, have popularized and exported narratives of how GIs are suffering in wars and on their return to their country.

In a conference in Prague in 2016, a German colleague was indeed distressed and dismayed when the Czech students of Czech sign language explained, that one slang form of representing Germans was to use fingers to indicate the Hitler moustache accompanied with the Hitler salute. This raises the question of the extent to which history, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, occupation and the World Wars have shaped the cultural narratives of Western Slavic peoples such as the Polish, the Czechs and the Slovaks. Iconic examples tend to stick in the collective imagination while the day-to-day realities of empires and occupations, wars and revolts, slowly fade away. These iconic examples become the resources of jokes that are

integrated into everyday speech, as in the sign for Germans in the Czech sign language slang. Only when Germans observe the way they are being referred to, does it become evident that the Slavs too have their cultural narratives, their prejudices, and that some of their jokes and expressions do not translate into other contexts.

Question five: Who laughs at Czech jokes?

A country that has produced *Švejk* (Hašek 2000) does not have to justify its credentials in World Literature. The humorous accounts of the Czech "hero" have shaped the way many nations perceive the absurdity of the First World War. Kundera's works such as *The Joke* (*Žert* 1996) and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (*Kniha smíchu i zapomnění* 1981) have amused readers throughout Europe and the West with tales of the ironies of existence and the way people live and love and try to make sense of their worlds within a Socialist system. Irony, the jokes people play on others, and the jokes fate plays on them, are central to Kundera's world and arguably part of the Czech worldview. However, much Czech humour remains unknown and is probably untranslatable. The following three examples should allow us to distinguish between the jokes that can and cannot be exported from the Czech context.

1. Czechs joked about calling 'work' the 'Mexican siesta': My tomu říkáme práce, Mexičani siesta. (Nejedlý 2018: 70). This joke fits into the kind of communist jokes that have outlived communist regimes. It is based on the underlying ironic assumption that "Nobody works in the workers' state". In this respect, it is similar to the jokes collected by Western authors such as Ben Lewis in his *Hammer & Tickle: A History of Communism told through communist jokes* published in London in 2008.
2. 'What's the difference between Antonín Novotný and Švejk? Švejk was clever but pretended to be dumb. And Novotný? Oh, well, you see, he served in the Imperial and Royal Army.' (Jaký je rozdíl mezi Antonínem Novotným a Švejkem? Švejk byl chytrý a předstíral blbost. A Novotný? Ach, vite, ten sloužil v c. a k. Armádě; Nejedlý

2018: 12). This joke might be considered "untranslatable" in that it taps into various traditions and narratives of Czech history and culture. We need to understand who Novotný and Švejk are and that one was a Czechoslovak president while Švejk is a fictitious Czech soldier enlisted in in the Austrian army during the First World War, who uses his cunning to play the imbecile in order to shirk work and survive in a war that has little meaning for him. Of course, the underlying logic of the joke is that our leaders are imbeciles, a common premise for jokes around the world, but to get to this simple conclusion, we first have to discern the contrast between imbeciles who pretend to be competent and the clever survivors playing dumb who are invariably subject to the will of incompetent leaders and bureaucrats.

3. 'What is an occupation? When an army occupies a certain land before the Soviet Union.' (Co je to okupace? Když nějaká armada obsadí určité ūzemí dřív než Sovětský svaz. Šebesta 2017: 98). This joke may appear very topical given the conflict in the Ukraine. But it simply does not fit into the cultural narratives that have shaped the understanding of Eastern and Central Europe in the West and communist jokes in general. Since the jokes about communism that have survived and circulate tend to be reductive and simplistic, they do not make room for the complex contrasts between being occupied by the Wehrmacht between 1939 and 1945 and by the Soviet forces between 1968 and 1989 which is the crux of this joke. This joke depends on understanding the hidden meaning of terms and propaganda and the way citizens are forced to adopt imposed definitions.

Question six: Who laughs at Croatian Jokes?

Western scholars in recent years have tended to reduce socialism to communism and communism to Stalinist Soviet communism. Even the most prudent specialists of Humour Studies, such as Davies (2011: 213–252) risk falling into this error by focusing on the waves of jokes that appeared in Soviet Russia. This tends to obscure the complex cultural narratives

that come into play within the individual socialist States and their relations with one another. Ultimately, such studies tend to confirm what the authors already feel or believe rather than forcing them to revise their own schematic and reductive conceptions of other regimes and the realities of the Cold War.

As the Czech jokes above show, the following three Croatian jokes should make it fairly obvious that some jokes might be exported from their context in Croatia, while others involve complex cultural narratives and socio-political and religious assumptions which make them difficult if not impossible to translate.

1. 'What was Yugoslavia called after Tito? Titanic.' (Kako se zvala Jugoslavia poslije Tita? Titanik; Božić 2013: 13). Tito is not known to many young Europeans, but arguably for older generations, he is still remembered. And it is possible that they will understand that the breakdown of Yugoslavia could be experienced as a disaster. The Titanic narrative, however culturally-specific, on the other hand, has been popularised by movies and documentaries and now certainly forms part of World Culture. But to what extent the break up of Yugoslavia was experienced as a "disaster" is something quite mysterious for most Westerners and varies in terms of the citizens of the new Nation States and their political views.
2. The following joke depends on understanding the relative sizes of Croatia and Slovenia. 'How come Slovenia slipped into the EU so easily? A street or two? What's the difference?' (Zašto je Slovenija tako brzo ušla u Evropsku uniju? Jedna ulica manje-više; Božić 2013: 13). In Western Europe, Slovenia and Croatia are viewed as robust economies with dynamic tourist industries. They belong among the "success stories" of European integration. But few Westerners have a clear idea of their relative sizes and they may find it difficult to understand why one nation regards the other as miniscule. This is clearly the kind of prejudice that generates jokes about the relative importance of Austria and Germany, and Scotland and England. For that reason, this joke would presumably be offensive for Slovenians and probably incomprehensible for most Europeans today.

3. 'What's the difference between the Catholic Church and the Croatian government? The Catholic Church preaches poverty and the Croatian government realizes it.' (Koja je razlika izmjeđu katoličke crkve i hrvatske vlade? Katolička crkva propovijeda siromaštvo, i hrvatska vlada ga realizira; Božić 2013: 37). The idea that Communism creates poverty and Capitalism creates wealth is a liberal principle and it can be observed in various jokes in Lewis (2008) and in the Czech and Croatian joke books and online joke websites. But this joke not only runs counter to this principle as a critique of neoliberal capitalism and the transformation of the economy in an ex-Yugoslavian nation, it makes an amusing parallel between the religious rhetoric that defends poverty and the kind of capitalism that produces it. The irony that the latter is somehow more "honest" is what is amusing. But to understand this, we also need to understand that how central religion is for ex-Yugoslavian peoples. The Croats are not traditionally a Muslim people (like many Bosnians), nor a traditionally Orthodox Christian people (like many Serbs). Catholicism is central to their notion of the Croatian people. Patriotism and faith are linked, and satirizing the rhetoric promoting patriotism, faith and politics becomes possible. Neither British protestants nor French Catholics are likely to appreciate these jokes, since they rely on a certain scepticism or cynicism regarding both religion and politics that is specific to the Croatian context.

Conclusion

It is clear to everyone that Slavs have had an enormous impact on sports, culture, work and economics in Western Europe. The Slovenian Hegelian cultural theorist, Slavoj Žižek, is arguably one of the most influential political thinkers of his generation in the West, and Žižek has also often insisted on the importance of jokes for culture, psychology and politics. He does not have the same approach as the one adopted in this chapter. Žižek is not interested in the questions developed here: What jokes are translatable? Who finds these jokes funny? What jokes go out of fash-

ion? Can we predict what jokes will make people laugh, and will remain "funny"? But Žižek (2025: 10–13) does make a contribution to our questions when he questions how we are to interpret the satires and parodies of Trump that are circulating today. Quoting Steven Marche in an article from the *LA Times* (Žižek 2025: 10), Žižek argues with him 'that Trump built his candidacy on performing as a comic heal – and that has been his pop culture persona for decades.' For Marche, Trump is lucid, ironic and parodies himself; and he 'has become the President of the United States on the basis of that performance' (Žižek 2025: 10). For that reason, it is simply not possible to parody Trump because parodies simply distract us from real politics and turn all politics into a form of comedy, a gag.

This may well be true, and if it is, then a Slovenian is helping Europeans to understand what is happening within American online media, and how we should respond to it. But Žižek does not speak about his compatriot, Melania Trump, and has not yet mentioned the Chinese Trump. Chongqing invites Chinese people and people around the world to respond to American politics; it is a personal and political response deeply enrooted in its own Chinese context and his comedy invites various responses from people in China and around the world. This reveals something essential about how jokes migrate and how humour transforms itself as it circulates. As the discussion of our six questions on Croatian jokes, Czech jokes, communist jokes, cultural narratives, prejudices and stereotypes should have demonstrated, cultures do not share the same histories, narratives, and stereotypes. So, it would be absurd to expect that the strategies and perspectives at work in jokes in one culture can be exported or transposed to a new cultural context without a radical reinterpretation of the jokes.

For this reason, we might feel inclined to simply conclude that jokes are untranslatable and that it is impossible to predict who will laugh at what and why? Žižek would no doubt take another perspective. And as Lewis' collection of communist jokes demonstrates, as Chongqing's TikTok parodies demonstrate, and as the success of *Satuday Night Live* worldwide demonstrates, comedians do export themselves and their humour. Globalization is a reality, and we share that reality in which songs, movies, series, TikTok and YouTube now have their place alongside literature and other forms of culture. We are left, therefore, as academics and researchers, to question what is happening and why; asking ourselves if we can under-

stand something about the complex migration of laughter. Translators tend to focus on texts and cultures, but jokes remind us that what is funny is more about people, contexts, situations and responses. And often that means breaking out in new directions and transforming implicit meanings or resisting or inverting humorous strategies.

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