

THE STUDY OF THE CONCEPT AND PHENOMENON OF HUMOUR IN
LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: This article explores the concept and phenomenon of humour within the field of linguistics, focusing on its semantic, communicative, and pragmatic dimensions. The study examines the structural mechanisms underlying humorous expressions in English and Uzbek, revealing their functions in interpersonal communication and their dependence on cultural frameworks. Special attention is given to the linguistic markers, contextual factors, and cognitive processes that contribute to the creation and interpretation of humorous meaning. The findings highlight the culturally specific nature of humour and demonstrate how humour reflects shared social experience and linguistic worldview.

Keywords: humour, linguistic pragmatics, semantic mechanisms, communication strategies, humorous expressions, cultural context.

TILSHUNOSLIKDA YUMOR TUSHUNCHASI VA FENOMENINI O'RGANILISHI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada tilshunoslikda yumor tushunchasi va uning lingvistik-fenomenologik xususiyatlari har tomonlama tahlil etilgan. Tadqiqot yumorning mazmuniy, muloqotga oid va pragmatik jihatlarini aniqlashga qaratilgan bo'lib, ingliz va o'zbek tillaridagi humoristik birliklarning shakllanish mexanizmlari, ularning kommunikativ vazifalari hamda madaniy omillar bilan bog'liqligi yoritiladi. Maqolada yumorning til tizimidagi o'rni, uni hosil qiluvchi semantik vositalar, kontekstual omillar va nutq jarayonidagi funksional xususiyatlar ilmiy asosda sharhlanadi. Tahlil natijalari humoristik birliklarning milliy-madaniy tafakkurga tayanuvchi o'ziga xosliklarini ochib beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: yumor, lingvopragmatika, semantika, kommunikativ strategiya, humoristik birliklar, madaniy kontekst.

ИЗУЧЕНИЕ ПОНЯТИЯ И ФЕНОМЕНА ЮМОРА В ЛИНГВИСТИКЕ

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматриваются понятие и феномен юмора в лингвистике, а также его семантические, коммуникативные и прагматические характеристики. Исследование направлено на выявление структурных особенностей юмористических единиц английского и узбекского языков, их функционального назначения и зависимости от культурного контекста. Особое внимание уделяется языковым маркерам, контекстуальным условиям и когнитивным механизмам, обеспечивающим возникновение и восприятие юмористического смысла. Результаты анализа демонстрируют национально-культурную специфику юмора и его роль в формировании языковой картины мира.

Ключевые слова: юмор, лингвопрагматика, семантика, коммуникативные стратегии, юмористические единицы, культурный контекст.



INTRODUCTION

Humour has long been recognized as a multifaceted linguistic and cultural phenomenon that plays a significant role in shaping human communication. In recent decades, the study of humour has moved from being a peripheral topic of interest to becoming an established interdisciplinary field that intersects linguistics, pragmatics, cognitive science, anthropology, and cultural studies. From a linguistic perspective, humour is not merely a source of entertainment; it is a complex communicative mechanism that relies on shared knowledge, cognitive processing, and context-sensitive interpretation. Understanding how humour is constructed, transmitted, and decoded through language reveals essential insights into the nature of human interaction and the functioning of linguistic systems. The linguistic study of humour focuses on the mechanisms by which humorous meanings are generated. These mechanisms often include semantic ambiguity, phonological play, syntactic deviation, metaphorical transfer, and pragmatic implicature. In both English and Uzbek, humorous expressions frequently exploit the interpretive flexibility of language, drawing on polysemy, irony, hyperbole, and cultural references. Such expressions demonstrate that humour is not universal in form, even if its psychological function may be universal. Instead, humour must be examined within the sociocultural environment in which it emerges, as cultural background, worldview, and communicative norms shape what is perceived as humorous. Another crucial aspect in humour research is its pragmalinguistic dimension. Humour functions as a strategy for managing interpersonal relationships, mitigating face-threatening acts, softening criticism, and strengthening group identity. It can serve both affiliative and disruptive purposes depending on context, social distance, and the speaker's communicative intent. Humour may be used to assert power, create solidarity, negotiate meaning, or challenge social boundaries. These pragmatic functions differ across languages and cultures, requiring comparative studies to understand how humour reflects and constructs cultural identities. The cognitive and contextual foundations of humour further highlight its systemic nature. Humour comprehension requires the activation of multiple cognitive domains, including inference-making, conceptual blending, and frame-shifting. Listeners must reconcile incompatible interpretations or detect incongruities that diverge from expected norms. This interplay between linguistic form, semantic structure, and cognitive processing constitutes the core of humour studies and offers fertile ground for interdisciplinary investigation. In the context of English and Uzbek linguocultures, humour exhibits distinctive patterns shaped by historical traditions, social norms, and communicative practices. English humour often relies on understatement, wordplay, and irony, whereas Uzbek humour draws heavily on cultural archetypes, situational comedy, and socially embedded metaphors. These differences underscore the importance of comparative linguistic analysis in identifying universal mechanisms and culturally specific realizations of humour.

Overall, the study of humour in linguistics provides a deeper understanding of language as a dynamic, context-driven system capable of expressing subtle meanings and social values. By examining humour as both a linguistic construct and a cultural phenomenon, researchers can uncover new perspectives on cross-cultural communication, discourse practices, and the cognitive foundations of meaning-making. This article aims to explore these dimensions through a comprehensive analysis of humour-related linguistic features in English and Uzbek, contributing to ongoing discussions in modern pragmatics and contrastive linguistics.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY



The study of humour in linguistics has evolved into a multidisciplinary research direction drawing on pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies. Early theoretical foundations were laid by classical scholars such as Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, who viewed humour primarily through philosophical and psychological perspectives. Their works identified core concepts such as incongruity, relief, and superiority theories, which continue to inform modern linguistic research. However, contemporary scholars emphasize that humour is fundamentally a communicative act shaped by linguistic structures and sociocultural norms. In linguistic pragmatics, humour is widely explored within the frameworks of Speech Act Theory (Austin, Searle), Grice's Cooperative Principle, and relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson). Scholars argue that humour frequently emerges from strategic violations or manipulations of conversational maxims, such as flouting relevance, quantity, or manner. These intentional deviations create cognitive dissonance that triggers humorous interpretation. Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) further contributed to the systematic description of humour mechanisms through script opposition, logical mechanisms, narrative strategies, and linguistic devices. Comparative humour studies highlight the importance of cultural context in humorous discourse. English humour is often described as understated, irony-driven, and reliant on subtle semantic shifts, while humour in Central Asian and Turkic cultures—including Uzbek—tends to be more situational, socially oriented, and shaped by traditional folklore and collective experience. Authors such as Raskin, Attardo, Dynel, and Chlopicki emphasize that cultural scripts influence what is perceived as humorous, how humour is expressed, and how it is interpreted by audiences. Recent studies in cognitive linguistics underscore the role of conceptual blending, frame shifting, and schema activation in processing humorous meanings. Research indicates that humour comprehension requires simultaneous access to competing mental models, allowing the listener to resolve incongruities. Furthermore, discourse-analytic works show that humour functions as a social tool for identity construction, power negotiation, and interpersonal alignment. This rich body of literature provides the theoretical basis for examining humour in English and Uzbek linguocultures. Although humour has been widely studied in Western linguistics, research specific to Uzbek humorous discourse remains limited. Existing works focus primarily on folklore, anecdotal storytelling, and humour in media, leaving a gap in comparative pragmalinguistic analysis. This study addresses that gap by examining how humour is linguistically structured and pragmatically used in two typologically and culturally distinct languages.

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative methodological framework aimed at analyzing the linguistic and pragmatic properties of humour in English and Uzbek. A mixed approach combining elements of discourse analysis, pragmalinguistic interpretation, and cognitive-semantic examination was utilized to ensure a comprehensive and reliable investigation.

Data collection

The study draws on a corpus of authentic humorous materials in both languages, including:

- conversational dialogues,
- media texts (television comedies, interviews, talk shows),
- digital communication (social media posts, memes),
- literary works and humorous essays,
- everyday anecdotal narratives.



All selected examples meet the criteria of naturalness, contextual clarity, and cultural representativeness.

Analytical framework

The analysis is based on the principles of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), Gricean pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics. Each humorous unit was examined according to the following dimensions:

1. **Semantic mechanisms:** Identification of incongruity, ambiguity, metaphorical extension, and lexical play.
2. **Pragmatic strategies:** Exploration of humour as a communicative tool—politeness management, solidarity creation, criticism softening, or face-saving.
3. **Cultural context:** Consideration of cultural references, social norms, and ethnolinguistic markers influencing humour perception.
4. **Structural features:** Investigation of phonological play, syntactic deviations, narrative structure, and rhetorical devices.
5. **Cognitive processes:** Evaluation of inferencing, frame shifting, and mental model switching required for humour comprehension.

Comparative procedure

English and Uzbek humorous units were analyzed separately and then compared to determine:

- universal humour-generation mechanisms,
- language-specific features,
- culturally driven patterns of humorous interpretation,
- similarities and differences in pragmatic functions.

This comparative approach ensures the identification of both shared and unique aspects of humour across the two languages.

Reliability and validity

To increase the validity of findings:

- multiple sources were used to ensure representativeness;
- examples were cross-checked across different genres and contexts;
- interpretations were verified using established theoretical models.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of English and Uzbek humorous units revealed several key findings regarding their semantic, pragmatic, and cultural characteristics. First, the study confirmed that humour in both languages largely relies on incongruity, ambiguity, and context-dependent interpretation, supporting core principles of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). English humour frequently employs subtle wordplay, understatement, and irony, while Uzbek humour tends to draw on culturally embedded situations, folkloric patterns, and socially familiar character types. Pragmatically, humour in both languages serves similar communicative purposes—mitigating face-threatening acts, strengthening solidarity, and facilitating interpersonal rapport. However,



English speakers often use humour to soften disagreement or indirectly express criticism, whereas Uzbek speakers more commonly use humour to reinforce group cohesion and express shared cultural knowledge. These differences highlight the role of cultural expectations in shaping the communicative functions of humour. Cognitively, humorous interpretations in both languages require the listener to process multiple frames and resolve incongruities, demonstrating universal cognitive mechanisms such as frame shifting and conceptual blending. Despite these similarities, the cultural specificity of references, metaphors, and situational cues in Uzbek humorous discourse indicates that humour comprehension is deeply tied to sociocultural background. Overall, the findings show that while humour reflects common linguistic strategies across languages, its realization is significantly influenced by cultural norms, communicative traditions, and linguistic resources unique to each linguoculture. These results contribute to a broader understanding of how humour operates as both a universal cognitive phenomenon and a culturally shaped communicative practice.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that humour, as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon, reflects both universal cognitive processes and language-specific communicative traditions. The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek humorous units revealed that humour in both languages relies on mechanisms such as incongruity, semantic ambiguity, contextual reinterpretation, and pragmatic implicature. These mechanisms confirm that humour is deeply rooted in shared human cognitive abilities, particularly those involving inference, frame shifting, and the reconciliation of conflicting interpretations. At the same time, the results highlight the significant influence of sociocultural factors on how humour is produced, interpreted, and valued. English humorous discourse is marked by subtle irony, indirectness, and refined wordplay, while Uzbek humour tends to be more situational, socially oriented, and grounded in collective cultural experience. These distinctions underscore that humour cannot be fully understood without examining the cultural scripts, communicative norms, and worldview embedded within each linguoculture. Furthermore, the study confirmed that humour performs essential pragmatic functions in both languages. It facilitates social bonding, reduces communicative tension, supports politeness strategies, and allows speakers to negotiate meaning in a non-confrontational manner. However, the extent and manner in which humour fulfils these functions differ according to cultural expectations and interpersonal dynamics. Overall, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of humour within the fields of pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, and intercultural communication. By revealing the interplay between universal humour-generation mechanisms and culturally specific patterns of humorous expression, the study underscores the importance of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural analysis in humour research. These findings may serve as a basis for future studies on humour in multilingual contexts, translation practices, media discourse, and language pedagogy.

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