



CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH HUMOR INTO UZBEK

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Abstract: *This thesis explores the significant linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural challenges faced in translating humor from English into Uzbek. Humor translation is one of the most complex fields of translation studies because it involves not only linguistic equivalence but also the transfer of cultural and cognitive scripts that produce laughter and amusement. The study identifies the difficulties of translating wordplay, irony, and culture-specific references, analyzing examples from English children’s literature and audiovisual media. The discussion demonstrates that humor often resists direct translation due to structural and pragmatic mismatches between English and Uzbek, as well as differing cultural perceptions of what is considered “funny.”*

Humor plays a central role in human communication, reflecting both universal cognitive mechanisms and specific cultural values (Attardo, 2014). When humor is transferred between languages, translators come across the dual task of preserving its emotional impact while adapting it to the target culture’s norms. In English–Uzbek translation, the challenge becomes particularly acute because of the typological and cultural distance between the two languages. English relies mostly on lexical ambiguity, phonological play, and sarcasm, while Uzbek humor is often situational, moralizing, or rhythmically structured. Below linguistic challenges are discussed with examples.

1. Wordplay and ambiguity. English humor frequently employs puns—jokes based on multiple meanings of a word or sound similarities (Delabastita, 1996). Example: “Why was six afraid of seven? Because seven eight (ate) nine.” In Uzbek, the homophony between ‘eight’ and ‘ate’ does not exist, making a literal translation ineffective. Translators must render the humor using a different linguistic mechanism, often by replacing the pun with a culturally relevant play on numbers or sounds. Uzbek equivalent: “Olti yettidan nega qo‘rqadi? Chunki yetti sakkizni yeb qo‘ygan!” Here, the humor is partially retained through explanatory translation, but the spontaneous playfulness is reduced.

2. Idioms and pragmatic mismatches. English humor often relies on idiomatic irony, such as “Break a leg!” or “You’re such a genius!” used sarcastically. Uzbek audiences may interpret these literally or as impolite unless adapted pragmatically. The translator must identify whether irony can be replaced by culturally acceptable forms, like using tone or exaggeration instead of lexical irony.

3. Culture-Specific References. English humor draws on local knowledge—holidays, TV shows, sports, or social stereotypes—that have no equivalents in Uzbek. For instance, the British dry humor style found in Peter Rabbit or Paddington Bear emphasizes





understatement and politeness, which may seem emotionless or confusing to Uzbek children accustomed to more expressive and moralistic humor.

4. Social Norms and Taboos. In English culture, jokes about bodily functions or mild teasing are mainly acceptable in children's contexts. In contrast, Uzbek culture traditionally restricts such topics, emphasizing politeness and respect. Thus, certain humorous situations are replaced with moral lessons or softened for local sensitivity. Some jokes that include irony toward authority figures or topics related to gender and religion may be considered inappropriate or even taboo.

Pragmatic Strategies for Translators: To overcome these challenges, translators use several strategies (Chiaro, 2010):

1. Adaptation: Replace untranslatable humor with a new, culturally fitting joke.
2. Compensation: Introduce humor elsewhere in the text to balance loss.
3. Explicitation: Clarify wordplay or irony using brief explanation or contextual cues.
4. Localization: Change names, settings, or situations to align with the target audience's background.

Translating humor from English into Uzbek requires more than linguistic skill—it demands intercultural sensitivity and creative equivalence. The success of humor translation depends on the translator's ability to reconstruct not only meaning but also the intended emotional and social effects of laughter. While total equivalence is rarely achievable, thoughtful adaptation can preserve the spirit of humor, enabling Uzbek children to enjoy foreign texts without losing their cultural resonance.

References:

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