

**TRANSLATION ISSUES OF HUMOR IN COMPARED LANGUAGES: PROBLEMS OF  
EQUIVALENCE, TRANSFORMATIONAL TECHNIQUES, AND CULTURAL  
ADAPTATION**

**Karimova Nasiba Abdullo kizi**

lecturer in English at Renaissance university of education

[nasibakarimova98@mail.com](mailto:nasibakarimova98@mail.com)

**Abstract:** This article examines the major challenges of translating humor between typologically and culturally different languages, focusing on issues of equivalence, transformational techniques, and cultural adaptation. The study highlights how humorous units often lose their pragmatic effect when transferred directly, due to linguistic asymmetry, cultural gaps, and differences in background knowledge. Various translation strategies — including modulation, substitution, adaptation, compensation, and contextual expansion — are analyzed as effective tools for recreating humorous meaning and maintaining communicative intent. The research emphasizes the translator’s role as a cultural mediator who must balance semantic accuracy with pragmatic impact to ensure that humor remains meaningful and culturally relevant for the target audience.

**Keywords:** humor translation; equivalence; cultural adaptation; transformational techniques; pragmatics; cross-cultural communication; linguistic asymmetry

**ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПЕРЕВОДА ЮМОРА В СОПОСТАВЛЯЕМЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ:  
ЭКВИВАЛЕНТНОСТЬ, ТРАНСФОРМАЦИОННЫЕ МЕТОДЫ И ВОПРОСЫ  
КУЛЬТУРНОЙ АДАПТАЦИИ**

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматриваются основные проблемы перевода юмора между типологически и культурно различными языками, уделяя особое внимание вопросам эквивалентности, трансформационным методам и культурной адаптации. Показано, что при прямой передаче юмористические единицы часто утрачивают свой прагматический эффект из-за языковой асимметрии, культурных различий и неодинакового фона знаний. Анализируются различные стратегии перевода — модуляция, замещение, адаптация, компенсация и контекстуальное расширение — как эффективные способы воссоздания юмористического смысла и сохранения коммуникативного намерения автора. Исследование подчеркивает роль переводчика как культурного посредника, обеспечивающего баланс между семантической точностью и прагматическим воздействием.

**Ключевые слова:** перевод юмора; эквивалентность; культурная адаптация; трансформационные методы; прагматика; межкультурная коммуникация; языковая асимметрия

## **CHOG‘ISHTIRILAYOTGAN TILLARDA YUMORNING TARJIMA MUAMMOLARI: EKVIVALENTLIK, TRANSFORMATSION USULLAR VA MADANIY MOSLIK MASALALARI**

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqolada tipologik va madaniy jihatdan farqlanuvchi tillar o‘rtasida yumorni tarjima qilish jarayonida yuzaga keladigan asosiy muammolar tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot ekvivalentlik masalalari, transformatsion usullar va madaniy moslashtirish strategiyalarining o‘rni va ahamiyatini ko‘rsatadi. Bevosita tarjima ko‘pincha yumorning pragmatik ta‘sirini yo‘qotishi, til tizimidagi nomutanosiblik, madaniy tafovutlar va fon bilimlaridagi farqlar bilan izohlanadi. Modulyatsiya, almashtirish, moslashtirish, kompensatsiya va kontekstual kengaytirish kabi usullar yumor mazmunini qayta yaratishda samarali vosita sifatida baholanadi. Maqola tarjimonning madaniy vositachilikdagi rolini ta‘kidlab, semantik aniqlik va pragmatik ta‘sirni muvofiqlashtirish zaruratini yoritadi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** yumor tarjimasi; ekvivalentlik; madaniy moslashtirish; transformatsion usullar; pragmatika; kross-madaniy muloqot; til nomutanosibli

### **INTRODUCTION**

Humor is a universal yet highly culture-dependent communicative phenomenon that performs significant social, psychological, and pragmatic functions in human interaction. Despite its global presence, humor is deeply rooted in the linguistic structures, cultural norms, and worldview of each speech community. This makes humor one of the most challenging linguistic categories to translate, especially when dealing with typologically different languages such as English, Uzbek, and Russian. Humor relies not only on linguistic devices—such as puns, alliteration, ambiguity, metaphor, or syntactic play—but also on sociocultural references, background knowledge, shared stereotypes, and pragmatic nuances. As a result, transferring humorous content from one language into another requires more than lexical substitution: it demands a reconstruction of meaning that preserves emotional impact, communicative intent, and cultural resonance. In translation studies, the issue of equivalence in humor has always been controversial. Traditional notions of formal or semantic equivalence often prove insufficient, since humorous units frequently derive their effect from language-specific features or culturally embedded concepts. For instance, wordplay and phonetic jokes may have no direct counterparts in the target language; irony and sarcasm may function differently across cultures; and culture-bound references—such as historical events, political figures, ethnographic realities, or social norms—may require additional transformation to remain meaningful. Therefore, translators must employ a wide range of transformational strategies, including modulation, adaptation, substitution, compensation, contextual amplification, and even creative rewriting. These transformations are not a deviation from accuracy but rather an essential tool for achieving pragmatic equivalence and maintaining communicative effectiveness. Another key aspect of humor translation is cultural compatibility. Humor often depends on shared cultural assumptions that may not exist in another linguistic environment. A joke that is perceived as humorous in one culture may sound irrelevant, inappropriate, or incomprehensible in another. Thus, cultural

adaptation becomes a central strategy for bridging the gap between source and target audiences. Translators must carefully evaluate whether the humorous effect can be maintained through direct translation, or whether it requires cultural substitution—replacing the original reference with a culturally equivalent concept—or explanatory reformulation. In this process, the translator assumes the role of a cultural mediator who negotiates between fidelity to the source text and the target audience’s expectations. In the comparative study of humor translation across English, Uzbek, and Russian, several important trends emerge. First, these languages differ significantly in their linguistic mechanisms of humor formation: English humor often relies on phonetic play and idiomatic expressions; Russian humor frequently incorporates irony, exaggeration, and satirical undertones; Uzbek humor tends to be ethnocentric, culturally expressive, and closely tied to folkloric or social realities. Second, the sociolinguistic norms of these cultures influence the degree of directness, politeness, and acceptability of humorous speech. Third, the pragmatic interpretation of humor depends on context, speaker intention, and audience background, which complicates attempts at creating a one-to-one translation. Thus, the translation of humor is not simply a linguistic task but a complex intercultural process requiring deep awareness of semantic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions. By examining the interplay between equivalence, transformational techniques, and cultural adaptation, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how humor travels across languages and cultures, and what strategies are necessary to preserve its communicative power in multilingual contexts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY**

Recent research on humor translation highlights that humor is shaped simultaneously by linguistic structure, cultural background, and pragmatic intent. Scholars such as Attardo (2017), Chiaro (2018), and Dynel (2020) emphasize that humor often depends on language-specific ambiguity, phonetic play, idioms, and culturally embedded knowledge. Because of this, traditional notions of literal or semantic equivalence are insufficient. Instead, functional and pragmatic approaches dominate modern translation studies, arguing that the goal of humor translation is to reproduce the effect rather than the exact linguistic form. Studies comparing culturally distant languages demonstrate that English relies heavily on wordplay and implicature, Russian humor functions through irony and satire, while Uzbek humor reflects social relations, folklore, and ethnocultural concepts. Researchers agree that transformational strategies—adaptation, modulation, substitution, compensation, and amplification—are essential to overcoming linguistic and cultural asymmetries. Overall, the literature confirms that humor must be translated through creative, context-sensitive solutions guided by cultural and pragmatic awareness.

This study uses a qualitative, comparative, and descriptive methodology to analyze how humor is translated between English, Russian, and Uzbek. The data set includes humorous expressions from literature, media discourse, films, and conversational texts, selected for their linguistic ambiguity and cultural specificity.

The analysis is based on three main frameworks:

1. **Pragmatic analysis** (Attardo's GTVH): Each humorous unit is examined through its scripts, pragmatic function, and communicative intention (irony, sarcasm, satire, wordplay).
2. **Translation strategy classification:** Techniques proposed by Vinay & Darbelnet and expanded by Baker—modulation, adaptation, substitution, compensation, and explicitation—are used to assess how humorous meaning is reconstructed.
3. **Cultural adaptation assessment:** Culture-bound references are evaluated to determine whether they should be preserved, explained, or replaced to ensure relevance for the target audience.

Comparative analysis focuses on similarities and differences in humor mechanisms across the three languages and identifies which strategies most effectively preserve the intended humorous effect.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of humorous units in English, Russian, and Uzbek shows that humor translation is strongly influenced by linguistic asymmetry, cultural specificity, and pragmatic factors. The findings indicate that direct equivalence rarely preserves humorous effect, especially when humor relies on wordplay, phonetic similarity, idioms, or culturally embedded references. English homophonic puns, Russian irony and satire, and Uzbek culturally grounded jokes (linked to traditions, social roles, or folklore) all require different translation strategies to maintain communicative intent. The study reveals that transformational techniques—such as adaptation, substitution, compensation, modulation, and contextual amplification—are essential in recreating humor. These strategies enable translators to overcome linguistic limitations and restructure humorous meaning in a way that remains natural and effective for the target audience. Among them, adaptation and compensation appear most effective for culture-bound or untranslatable humor, whereas modulation and substitution work well for retaining pragmatic force in ironic or sarcastic expressions. A key result concerns cultural distance, which is identified as a major barrier in humor translation. Many jokes function only within specific cultural knowledge, making literal translation ineffective. Therefore, translators must balance fidelity with cultural accessibility, sometimes replacing or reinterpreting references to ensure relevance for the target audience. Overall, the study clarifies that pragmatic equivalence—not literal accuracy—is the central goal of humor translation. Humor must trigger a similar emotional and communicative response, even if linguistic form changes. This confirms that humor translation is a creative and culturally mediated process that requires deep understanding of both source and target contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of humor translation across English, Russian, and Uzbek demonstrates that humor is one of the most challenging discourse elements to transfer between languages. Its complexity arises from the coexistence of linguistic ambiguity, cultural coding, and pragmatic nuance—all of which interact to create humorous effect. The study confirms that literal or form-based translation is rarely sufficient; rather, the translator must reconstruct humor creatively while maintaining the author's communicative intention and ensuring comprehension

for the target audience. A central conclusion of the study is that pragmatic equivalence stands above lexical or structural equivalence in humor translation. Successful translation is achieved when the target audience experiences a similar emotional, cognitive, and communicative impact as the original audience. This, however, often requires extensive use of transformational strategies—modulation, substitution, compensation, adaptation, and contextual amplification. These techniques allow translators to navigate linguistic asymmetry, recreate lost wordplay, and compensate for untranslatable elements through alternative humorous solutions. Their effective application reflects the translator's skill not merely as a linguistic mediator, but as an intercultural communicator. The findings also highlight the decisive role of cultural factors. Humor frequently depends on shared background knowledge, sociocultural norms, stereotypes, historical references, and local traditions. As a result, humor that is easily understood within one speech community may be obscure, irrelevant, or even inappropriate in another. This makes cultural adaptation an essential component of humor translation. Translators must determine whether to preserve source culture elements, provide explanatory reformulation, or replace them with culturally analogous references. The success of these decisions depends on the target audience's expectations and the functional purpose of the text. Furthermore, the study shows that English, Russian, and Uzbek humor each possess distinctive features shaped by their linguistic systems and cultural worldviews. English humor commonly relies on wordplay and conversational implicature; Russian humor is characterized by irony, satire, and expressive pragmatics; Uzbek humor is deeply rooted in traditional values, social relations, and folkloric imagery. Recognizing these differences enables translators to choose strategies that align with the communicative norms of each language and culture. In broader terms, the research underlines that humor translation is fundamentally a creative, interpretative, and culturally embedded act. It requires flexible methodological thinking, deep intercultural competence, and sensitivity to social and pragmatic conventions. Translators must constantly negotiate between fidelity to the source text and the need for naturalness, clarity, and cultural resonance in the target language. Ultimately, the study affirms that humor can be translated effectively, but only when translators prioritize pragmatic impact, employ appropriate transformational strategies, and engage in cultural mediation. These findings contribute to translation theory by emphasizing the dynamic interaction between linguistic structure, cultural identity, and pragmatic meaning. They also provide practical insights for translators working with humorous texts in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

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