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STRATEGIES FOR RECREATING COMIC EFFECT IN UZBEK TRANSLATIONS OF ENGLISH JOKES

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Abstract. This article examines strategies for recreating comic effect in Uzbek translations of English jokes. It explores how wordplay, irony, ambiguity, cultural references, and unexpected punchlines generate humour and pose challenges for translators. Particular attention is paid to preserving the relationship between the setup and the punchline, implicit meanings, and the pragmatic impact of the original. The article discusses contextual substitution, cultural adaptation, compensation, and reformulation as possible strategies for conveying humour across linguistic and cultural boundaries. It also considers how excessive explanation and literal translation may weaken comic effect.

Keywords: joke translation, comic effect, humour translation, translation strategies, wordplay, irony, punchline, cultural adaptation, compensation, pragmatic equivalence.

Introduction: Translating humour involves conveying meanings, expectations, and cultural associations that enable readers to recognise a text as amusing. This task is particularly demanding in jokes, where a brief narrative or dialogue often culminates in a punchline that challenges the reader's initial interpretation. The comic effect may depend on ambiguity, wordplay, irony, or a contrast between an expected outcome and an unexpected response. When these mechanisms rely on features specific to English, their recreation in Uzbek requires careful consideration of both linguistic resources and cultural context.

English and Uzbek differ in their grammatical structures, idiomatic expressions, and conventions of interaction. These differences can affect how humorous meanings are constructed and understood. An English joke based on the multiple meanings of a word, for example, may lose its ambiguity when translated into Uzbek because the corresponding meanings are expressed by separate lexical items. Similarly, a culturally specific reference may be readily understood by the original audience but provide insufficient clues for Uzbek readers to recognise the intended humour. Consequently, semantic accuracy alone does not ensure that a translated joke will retain its comic effect.

The relationship between the setup and the punchline is especially important in this process. The setup establishes an interpretive framework, while the punchline introduces information that encourages readers to reconsider it. A translation that reveals the ambiguity too early, changes the order of essential information, or explains the implied meaning may weaken this relationship. Translators therefore need to consider not only what a joke communicates but also when and how its humorous meaning becomes accessible to the reader.

Several strategies may help address these challenges, including contextual substitution, cultural adaptation, compensation, and reformulation. Their suitability depends on the mechanism underlying a particular joke. Cultural adaptation may make an unfamiliar reference more accessible, whereas compensation may recreate a humorous feature through a different linguistic device. However, these choices also involve potential changes to characterisation, cultural identity, and

evaluative meaning. Recreating humour thus requires a balance between preserving relevant features of the original and producing a concise, natural, and interpretable Uzbek text.

This article aims to examine strategies for recreating comic effect in Uzbek translations of English jokes. It focuses on the linguistic and cultural factors that influence the transfer of humour, the preservation of the setup–punchline relationship, and the possibilities and limitations of selected translation strategies. Particular attention is given to how translators can maintain implicit meaning and humorous surprise without introducing excessive explanation. The discussion approaches comic effect as a context-dependent interaction between textual cues and reader interpretation, rather than an automatic consequence of lexical equivalence.

Materials and methods: This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative approach to examining strategies for recreating comic effect in Uzbek translations of English jokes. The analytical material consists of illustrative English jokes constructed for this discussion and their proposed Uzbek translations. The examples are used to demonstrate translation choices rather than to represent a comprehensive corpus. The complete joke serves as the unit of analysis, since humorous meaning emerges from the interaction between the setup, contextual clues, and the punchline.

The analysis combines close reading, contextual interpretation, and source–target comparison. Each example is first examined to identify its humour mechanism, explicit meaning, and underlying assumptions. The proposed Uzbek version is then assessed in terms of naturalness, information order, implicit meaning, and the relationship between the setup and the punchline. Translation procedures are described as direct translation, contextual substitution, cultural adaptation, compensation, or reformulation, with the recognition that several procedures may operate within a single example.

Lexical ambiguity is illustrated by the joke: “Why did you bring a ladder to school?” – “Because I wanted to go to high school.” Its humour depends on connecting the educational term *high school* with the spatial meaning of *high*. A literal Uzbek translation does not preserve this connection naturally. The proposed adaptation, “Nega maktabga narvon olib kelding?” – “Ustozim: ‘Bilimingni yuksaltir’, degandi,” replaces the original ambiguity with a literal interpretation of the figurative expression *bilimni yuksaltirmoq*. This example is examined as contextual reformulation and compensation because the wording changes while the broader mechanism of associating educational advancement with physical height is retained.

A second example concerns the reinterpretation of apparent praise: “My boss says I’m irreplaceable.” – “That’s wonderful!” – “Nobody else wants my job.” The proposed Uzbek version is: “Boshlig‘im: ‘Sening o‘rningni hech kim bosolmaydi’, deydi.” – “Zo‘r-ku!” – “Ishimni qilishni boshqa hech kim xohlamaydi.” Here, a relatively direct translation maintains the initial positive expectation and its subsequent reversal. The comparison focuses on whether the final sentence allows readers to reinterpret the preceding statement without an additional explanation that would make the implied criticism explicit.

The translations are evaluated according to the preservation or reconstruction of the humour mechanism, coherence between the setup and the punchline, accessibility of contextual references, naturalness of Uzbek expression, and retention of implicit meaning. Particular attention is paid to additions that might reveal the humorous interpretation prematurely. The assessment remains interpretive and text-based: it identifies features that may support comic effect but does not

establish equivalent audience responses. Such claims would require a separate reader-response study.

Results and discussion: The comparison of the illustrative English jokes and their proposed Uzbek translations suggests that recreating comic effect depends on preserving or reconstructing the relationship between the setup and the punchline. Lexical correspondence contributes to this process, but it is insufficient when humour relies on ambiguity or figurative meanings that operate differently in the two languages. The examples demonstrate two possible outcomes: a relatively direct translation can retain the original humorous mechanism, or reformulation can introduce a related mechanism through different linguistic resources. These observations concern the selected texts and do not establish how audiences would respond to the translations.

The ladder joke illustrates the limitations of literal translation when humour depends on language-specific polysemy. In the English exchange, "Why did you bring a ladder to school?" – "Because I wanted to go to high school," the punchline connects an established educational term with the spatial meaning of *high*. The expression initially refers to a stage of education but is reinterpreted as a place reached by climbing. A literal Uzbek rendering using *yuqori maktab* does not reproduce the same relationship naturally, since the phrase does not carry the relevant conventional educational meaning in Uzbek.

The proposed adaptation, "Nega maktabga narvon olib kelding?" – "Ustozim: 'Bilimingni yuksaltir', degandi," reconstructs the humour through the figurative expression *bilimni yuksaltirmoq*. The ladder becomes a response to an instruction about intellectual advancement interpreted as physical upward movement. This solution retains the school setting and the contrast between abstract progress and physical height. However, it changes the immediate content of the punchline and introduces a teacher's instruction that is absent from the English version. The adaptation therefore illustrates a trade-off: greater linguistic accessibility is achieved through a departure from the original wording and situation.

This example also clarifies the relationship between reformulation and compensation. Reformulation changes how the humorous situation is expressed, while compensation introduces a different linguistic opportunity for humour when the original one cannot be transferred directly. In the proposed Uzbek version, both procedures operate together. Their justification rests on a recognisable connection between the source mechanism and the replacement mechanism. Without such a connection, an adaptation could become an independent joke rather than a translation of the selected text.

The workplace joke presents a different translation problem. In "My boss says I'm irreplaceable." – "That's wonderful!" – "Nobody else wants my job," the comic effect emerges from a change in the explanation of *irreplaceable*. The opening statement encourages a positive interpretation: the employee possesses exceptional abilities. The final sentence replaces this interpretation with a less flattering one: the position is undesirable. Unlike the ladder joke, this reversal does not depend on an English word having two unrelated dictionary meanings. It relies mainly on the reader's assumptions about why an employee might be difficult to replace.

The proposed Uzbek translation, "Boshlig'im: 'Sening o'rningni hech kim bosolmaydi', deydi." – "Zo'r-ku!" – "Ishimni qilishni boshqa hech kim xohlamaydi," preserves this sequence with relatively little reformulation. The expression *o'rnini bosolmaslik* supports the initial interpretation of professional value, while the final sentence provides an alternative explanation. The brief response *Zo'r-ku!* reinforces the favourable reading before it is undermined. This suggests that direct translation remains a suitable option when the relevant inference is available in both languages.

Information order is central to both examples. The setup establishes an expectation, and the final statement supplies the information needed to revise it. Revealing the alternative interpretation earlier would reduce the contrast between these stages. For example, introducing the workplace joke by stating that the employee has an unpopular job would make the final sentence predictable. Similarly, explaining the ladder joke before presenting the punchline would remove the reader's opportunity to discover the misunderstanding. Translation choices must therefore account for the timing of meaning as well as its content.

The examples further suggest that explicitation has different consequences depending on what is explained. Clarifying an unfamiliar contextual detail may help readers understand the situation. Explaining the inference responsible for humour, however, may weaken the punchline. A translation of the workplace joke that adds "because the working conditions are poor" would impose a specific explanation that the original leaves unstated. It would also shift the text from an economical exchange towards commentary. Preserving interpretive space is therefore relevant to maintaining both brevity and humorous surprise.

Naturalness of expression also affects the coherence of the translated dialogue. In the Uzbek workplace example, *Zo'r-ku!* functions as a concise conversational response. Its contribution lies in supporting the apparent praise rather than adding a separate humorous element. Nevertheless, colloquial particles and expressive wording require restraint. Excessive emotional emphasis could alter a restrained joke into a more openly mocking exchange and change the speaker's implied attitude.

Taken together, the illustrative comparisons support a context-dependent choice of strategy. Direct translation is useful where the source inference remains accessible, whereas compensation and reformulation may be needed where the original ambiguity cannot be reproduced. Cultural adaptation remains relevant as an analytical category, but these two examples do not provide sufficient evidence to evaluate its effectiveness independently. The discussion therefore points to the value of selecting strategies according to the particular source of humour, while recognising that claims about their success with Uzbek readers require empirical investigation.

Conclusion: The analysis of the illustrative examples suggests that recreating comic effect in Uzbek translations of English jokes requires attention to the humour mechanism, the relationship between the setup and the punchline, and the reader's access to implicit meaning. Semantic accuracy contributes to successful translation, but language-specific ambiguity may require changes in wording or the reconstruction of the humorous situation.

The examples demonstrate that relatively direct translation can preserve humour when the underlying inference remains accessible in both languages. Where lexical ambiguity cannot be transferred naturally, contextual reformulation and compensation offer possible alternatives. Such adaptations should retain a recognisable relationship with the original mechanism while avoiding unnecessary changes to meaning and characterisation.

Brevity, natural expression, and the timing of information are also significant. Excessive explanation may reveal the intended interpretation prematurely and weaken humorous surprise. Translators should therefore preserve the clues that guide interpretation while allowing readers to infer the comic meaning themselves.

These conclusions remain limited to text-based analysis of constructed examples. Further research using authentic joke collections and reader-response methods would help determine how Uzbek audiences perceive different translation strategies and their humorous effects.

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