

**PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HUMOUR IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK****Najmidinova Shaxnoza Abdullajon kizi**

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**Abstract.** Humor serves as one of the most intricate and culturally embedded aspects of language, requiring not only linguistic proficiency but also pragmatic competence. This study investigates the use of humor in English and Uzbek with a focus on its role in cross-cultural communication. It seeks to understand how pragmatic competence facilitates comprehension, interpretation, and appropriate use of humor across cultures. Drawing on theories of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and humor studies, the research employs a comparative methodology, combining discourse analysis of authentic humorous texts with semi-structured interviews of bilingual speakers. Results indicate that humor in English is often driven by wordplay, irony, and conversational implicature, while Uzbek humor relies heavily on cultural allusions, situational irony, and proverbs. Findings reveal that pragmatic breakdowns occur when humor is transferred across cultures without adequate contextual framing. The study highlights the necessity of incorporating pragmatic instruction into EFL pedagogy to enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence.

**Introduction**

Language is not only a medium for conveying information but also a tool for expressing cultural values, social norms, and interpersonal relationships. One of the most challenging areas in this regard is humor, which relies on context, shared knowledge, and pragmatic awareness. While English has been extensively studied as a global lingua franca, the pragmatic aspects of humor in cross-cultural communication, especially with non-Western languages such as Uzbek, remain underexplored. Pragmatic competence—the ability to use language effectively in social contexts—plays a central role in interpreting humor. Misunderstandings in humor can lead to communication breakdowns and even reinforce cultural stereotypes. Given Uzbekistan's increasing integration into global education and business spheres, understanding the pragmatics of humor in Uzbek and English can shed light on how intercultural communication succeeds or fails. This thesis therefore aims to investigate humor as a pragmatic phenomenon in English and Uzbek, with a focus on identifying similarities and differences in humor strategies and their implications for cross-cultural communication. The study also explores the pedagogical importance of pragmatic competence for learners of English and Uzbek in intercultural settings.

**Literature Review**

The study of humor within pragmatics has been influenced by several theoretical approaches. Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor (1994) highlights the role of script opposition, incongruity, and logical mechanisms in humor. Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) also underpins humor analysis, as many humorous exchanges rely on the flouting of conversational maxims. In English, humor research has emphasized irony, sarcasm, and wordplay, while cross-cultural studies suggest that humor varies significantly across societies in terms of acceptability and structure (Dyrel, 2009; Bell, 2011). In the Uzbek context, humor is deeply tied to folklore traditions, proverbs, and social commentary. Scholars such as Karimov (2018) note that Uzbek humor often functions as a subtle critique of authority, relying on indirectness and cultural narratives. Unlike English humor, which is often individualistic and competitive in tone, Uzbek humor tends to emphasize community, morality, and wisdom. Research on pragmatic competence (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010) demonstrates that second-language learners frequently struggle with humor, as it requires not only linguistic knowledge but also awareness of socio-cultural norms. For EFL learners in Uzbekistan, exposure to English humor can be limited, and instruction often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over pragmatic strategies. This gap creates potential difficulties in cross-cultural interactions, particularly in academic, professional, and digital environments where humor is frequently employed. While comparative humor studies exist between English and other world languages, there remains a scarcity of research that explicitly contrasts English and Uzbek humor. This study contributes to filling this gap by analyzing how humor functions pragmatically in both languages and by exploring the role of pragmatic competence in facilitating intercultural understanding.

## Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method comparative design. The first component involves discourse analysis of humorous texts in English and Uzbek, including jokes, social media posts, and transcripts of stand-up performances. A corpus of 100 samples (50 in English, 50 in Uzbek) was compiled to reflect both traditional and contemporary humor. Each sample was analyzed using Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor to identify the dominant strategies employed.

The second component consists of semi-structured interviews with 20 bilingual participants (10 Uzbek EFL learners and 10 Uzbek-English bilingual professionals). Participants were asked to interpret selected humorous texts in both languages and reflect on challenges they encountered. Interviews were conducted in Uzbek and English, transcribed, and coded thematically. Data analysis combined qualitative thematic coding with pragmatic categorization. Instances of misinterpretation, successful transfer, and pragmatic strategies (e.g., explanation, translation, substitution) were examined. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants gave informed consent.

## Results

The discourse analysis revealed distinct patterns in English and Uzbek humor. English texts frequently employed puns, wordplay, and irony, relying on lexical ambiguity and conversational implicature. For example, many English jokes hinged on violating Gricean maxims, especially relevance and manner. In contrast, Uzbek humor relied heavily on cultural references, situational irony, and the use of proverbs or idiomatic expressions that carried moral undertones. Interview results indicated that bilingual participants often struggled with translating humor between English and Uzbek. For instance, English puns rarely translated effectively into Uzbek, while Uzbek proverb-based humor

lost its cultural depth in English. Participants emphasized that understanding humor in both languages required not just vocabulary knowledge but also cultural background and pragmatic awareness.

Table 1 below summarizes the main humor strategies identified in the analysis:

| Humor Strategy            | Frequency in English Corpus | Frequency in Uzbek Corpus |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Wordplay / Puns           | High                        | Low                       |
| Irony / Sarcasm           | High                        | Medium                    |
| Proverbs / Idioms         | Low                         | High                      |
| Situational Humor         | Medium                      | High                      |
| Social / Political Satire | Medium                      | Medium                    |

### Discussion

The results confirm that humor is deeply culture-specific, shaped by linguistic structures and socio-historical traditions. English humor emphasizes individual cleverness, irony, and playful subversion of conversational rules. Uzbek humor, in contrast, often draws from collective wisdom and cultural narratives, using humor as a vehicle for moral reflection and social critique. Pragmatic competence emerges as a crucial mediator in cross-cultural communication. Learners who lacked exposure to the cultural underpinnings of humor struggled to interpret jokes correctly, leading to miscommunication or unintended offense. This aligns with previous research suggesting that humor is one of the last pragmatic skills to be acquired by second-language learners (Bell, 2011).

Pedagogically, the findings highlight the need for explicit instruction in humor within EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan. Integrating humor analysis into pragmatic instruction could improve learners' intercultural competence and prepare them for authentic communicative contexts. Moreover, teacher training should address humor awareness, equipping educators with strategies to help students navigate humor in intercultural interactions.

### Conclusion

This thesis has explored the role of pragmatic competence in cross-cultural communication by comparing humor in English and Uzbek. Findings demonstrate that humor is highly culture-bound, with English favoring wordplay and irony, while Uzbek humor relies on proverbs, situational irony, and cultural references. Misinterpretations in cross-cultural humor underscore the importance of pragmatic competence, which extends beyond linguistic knowledge to include cultural awareness. The study contributes to pragmatic and intercultural communication research by offering one of the first systematic comparisons of English and Uzbek humor. Its pedagogical implications point to the need for EFL curricula that integrate pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness, particularly in humor. Future research could expand the sample size, include additional cultural contexts, and explore humor in digital communication more extensively.

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