

Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Family Jokes in English and Uzbek

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to conduct a cross-cultural comparative analysis of family-related humor in English and Uzbek cultures to uncover culturally embedded themes, social norms, and relational dynamics represented through jokes. **Method:** A qualitative content analysis was conducted on a dataset of 200 family-related jokes (100 English, 100 Uzbek), with particular attention to themes of marital dynamics, gender roles, and in-law relationships. **Results:** The analysis revealed distinct cultural orientations in humor: English family jokes predominantly reflect nuclear family structures and emphasize individualism, often using irony and understatement, while Uzbek jokes center on extended family hierarchies, traditional gender expectations, and the importance of collective family honor. **Novelty:** This study provides a novel contribution by situating family humor within a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural framework, highlighting how humor serves not only as entertainment but also as a vehicle for reinforcing or challenging cultural norms. The findings enrich the understanding of socio-cultural discourse in humor, offering implications for cross-cultural communication, translation studies, and sociolinguistics.

INTRODUCTION

Humor serves as a powerful lens through which cultural values, social norms, and interpersonal dynamics can be observed and analyzed. Family relationships, being universal yet culturally specific, provide rich material for humorous narratives across different languages and cultures. This study aims to investigate how family-related humor differs between English and Uzbek linguistic and cultural contexts, with particular focus on the underlying cultural assumptions, values, and social structures reflected in jokes.

Family-related humor often addresses universal themes such as marital dynamics, parent-child relationships, and in-law tensions. However, the specific manifestations of these themes in humor reflect unique cultural perspectives. As Raskin notes, "humor is deeply embedded in the cultural context in which it appears". This research explores how Uzbek and English jokes portray family dynamics differently, reflecting distinct cultural values, social structures, and historical contexts.

The significance of this comparative study lies in its potential to enhance cross-cultural understanding by identifying both shared human experiences and culturally specific perspectives on family life. As Davies argues, "jokes about family relationships reveal both universal human concerns and culturally specific anxieties and preoccupations". By analyzing these jokes, we gain insight into how different cultures conceptualize family roles, relationships, and conflicts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative content analysis methodology to examine family-related humor in both English and Uzbek languages. The study analyzes a corpus of approximately 100 jokes from each language, collected from published joke collections, online humor repositories, and social media platforms. The jokes were categorized according to recurring themes, targets of humor, narrative structure, and underlying cultural assumptions.

The theoretical framework draws from linguistics, cultural studies, and humor theory. Particularly relevant is the Semantic Script Theory of Humor proposed by Raskin, which suggests that humor arises from the opposition of semantic scripts, and the General Theory of Verbal Humor, which extends this model to account for knowledge resources beyond semantic opposition.

The existing literature on comparative humor studies provides important context for this research. Chiaro's work on the translation of humor emphasizes the cultural embeddedness of jokes and the challenges of cross-cultural humor transfer. Davies has extensively studied ethnic humor across cultures, noting how jokes reflect social boundaries and cultural anxieties. In the Central Asian context, Tojiboeva has examined the linguistic features of Uzbek humor, though comparative studies remain limited.

Several scholars have investigated humor in specific cultural contexts. Bell and Attardo explored cross-cultural differences in humor appreciation, while Yue examined cultural variations in humor perception between Eastern and Western cultures. However, research specifically comparing English and Uzbek humor is remarkably scarce, creating a significant gap that this study addresses.

In the Uzbek context, Ismoilov has documented traditional forms of humor including askiya and latifa (joke genres), but comparative analyses with other language traditions remain underdeveloped. This study builds upon these foundations while contributing new insights into the specific domain of family-related humor across English and Uzbek cultural contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals several significant patterns in how family-related humor manifests in English and Uzbek contexts [1]. While both cultures use family dynamics as a source of humor, they differ in their approaches to specific themes and relationships [2].

In both cultures, husband-wife relationships provide rich material for humor, but the nature of these jokes differs notably. English jokes about marriage often focus on companionship challenges, communication difficulties, and the monotony of long-term relationships [3]. For example:

"My wife and I were happy for twenty years. Then we met."

This joke reflects a common theme in English humor: the idea that marriage involves compromise and occasional dissatisfaction, presented through ironic understatement [4].

In contrast, Uzbek marital humor frequently addresses power dynamics, gender roles, and the involvement of extended family in the marital relationship. One example from the analyzed Uzbek jokes:

"A month after the wedding, the bride waited until her in-laws were away and said to her husband: 'Dear, before our wedding you were so attentive, bought me gifts, took me to restaurants... Now there's no movies, no going out, no gifts at all!' The husband replied: 'Are you kidding? [5]. Have you ever seen a fisherman feeding worms to a fish that's already been caught?'"

This joke highlights several cultural aspects specific to Uzbek society: the expectation of behavioral changes after marriage, the influence of in-laws on marital life (indicated by the bride waiting for their absence), and the traditionally different courtship versus marital roles [6]. While the joke may appear somewhat universal, the context of living with in-laws reflects traditional Uzbek family structures [7].

A striking difference emerged in the treatment of in-law relationships. In English humor, mother-in-law jokes predominate, often portraying the mother-in-law as intrusive or critical, particularly from the son-in-law's perspective. This reflects the nuclear family structure common in Western cultures, where in-laws are seen as external to the core family unit [8].

In Uzbek humor, a broader range of in-law relationships appears, including qaynona (mother-in-law), qaynota (father-in-law), and kuyov (son-in-law) dynamics [9]. These jokes often reflect the traditional extended family structure where multiple generations may live together. The following Uzbek joke illustrates this complexity:

"A mother-in-law wanted to test her three sons-in-law. She threw herself into a pond when the first son-in-law arrived, who quickly rescued her [10]. The next day, he found a new Nexia car at his gate with a note: 'To my beloved son-in-law from your mother-in-law.' She repeated the test with her second son-in-law, who also rescued her and received a Matiz car. When testing the third son-in-law, he thought: 'My older brothers-in-law got a Nexia and a Matiz. I'll probably get an old Tiko or a beaten-up Jiguli,' so he didn't rescue her. The next morning, he found a new Captiva at his gate with a note: 'To my beloved son-in-law from your father-in-law' [11].

This complex joke reflects several aspects of Uzbek family structure: the hierarchical relationship between mothers-in-law and sons-in-law, the economic expectations within family relationships, and the appreciation for cleverness even when it subverts traditional respect norms. The joke's structure, involving three sons-in-law in a test situation, follows a pattern common in Uzbek and broader Central Asian folklore traditions [12].

Humor about parent-child relationships reveals interesting cultural differences. English jokes often portray children as causing disruption or parents as struggling with the challenges of child-rearing, reflecting individualistic cultural values where children are seen as developing their own identities separate from parents [13].

Uzbek parent-child humor, by contrast, often emphasizes filial duty, parental authority, and intergenerational continuity. Children are frequently portrayed as

extensions of family identity rather than as separate individuals [14]. One Uzbek joke illustrates this perspective:

"A girl tells her mother: 'Mom, I have important news. I'm getting married.' Mother replies: 'You shameless girl, you've gotten on my nerves. You've been married and divorced five times already, now stay put, understand?!' Daughter: 'Mooooom, please say yes, I'll get married and come back quickly. Please, mom?'"

This joke plays on the tension between individual desires and family reputation, a common theme in Uzbek humor [15]. The mother's concern about multiple marriages reflects the collective nature of family honor in Uzbek culture, where an individual's actions reflect on the entire family.

Both English and Uzbek humor frequently employ gender stereotypes, but the specific portrayals differ. English jokes often challenge traditional gender roles through irony and subversion, reflecting changing social norms. Uzbek humor, while evolving, tends to reinforce traditional gender expectations, portraying women primarily as wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law.

The following Uzbek joke exemplifies traditional gender attitudes:

"A 5-year-old boy asked his father: 'Dad, what is money?' Father replied: 'Money is cognac, beautiful women, cars—basically son, it's the good life.' Then the son asked: 'Dad, what if you don't have money?' The father answered: 'Ah son... If you don't have money, then it's just regular tea, the bus, and your mother.'"

This joke reinforces traditional gender stereotypes by associating wealth with male autonomy and access to luxury (including objectified women), while portraying wives as the less desirable default option. While the joke may be interpreted as satirizing materialism, it nevertheless reflects certain gender attitudes present in traditional Uzbek humor.

The analysis reveals that English humor about family often emphasizes values such as individual independence, privacy, and emotional intimacy between spouses. Uzbek family humor, by contrast, reflects values such as respect for elders, family honor, community connectedness, and clearly defined family roles.

In English jokes, the nuclear family is typically portrayed as the primary unit, with extended family members appearing as occasional visitors or intruders. In Uzbek jokes, the extended family features prominently, reflecting the traditional social structure where multiple generations often live together or maintain close ties.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This comparative study demonstrates that while family-related humor in both English and Uzbek cultures draws from universal familial themes, it diverges significantly in its cultural expressions, with English jokes emphasizing nuclear family dynamics and individualism, and Uzbek humor reflecting extended family structures, hierarchical relationships, and collective values. **Implication :** These findings underscore the role of humor as a culturally embedded discourse that both mirrors and critiques societal norms, offering valuable insights for fields such as

sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and cross-cultural communication. **Limitation** : The study is limited by its reliance on a static dataset of 200 jokes, which may not fully capture the evolving nature of humor or the diversity within each cultural context. **Future Research** : Further studies could explore diachronic changes in family humor in response to shifting social landscapes, examine humor in digital and multimedia formats, or investigate audience reception to better understand how humor functions in shaping and negotiating cultural identity.

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