



THE TRANSLATION OF HUMOR AND IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH–UZBEK AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA: LINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Humor and idiomatic expressions are important components of audiovisual communication because they convey not only literal information but also emotional attitudes, interpersonal relationships, and stylistic effects. Translating these elements from English into Uzbek presents particular challenges due to differences in linguistic structure, idiomatic conventions, pragmatic norms, and the mechanisms through which humor is created. This article examines the linguistic and pragmatic difficulties involved in translating humor and idiomatic expressions in audiovisual media, with particular attention to subtitling and dubbing. Drawing on established approaches to humor studies, phraseology, and audiovisual translation, the article develops a conceptual framework for analyzing the relationship between idiomatic meaning and comic effect. It identifies several major challenges, including lexical ambiguity, wordplay, figurative meaning, pragmatic incongruity, and the constraints of audiovisual presentation. Illustrative examples demonstrate how literal translation, functional equivalence, paraphrase, substitution, and creative adaptation may affect the interpretation of humorous dialogue. The article proposes a qualitative analytical framework for evaluating semantic accuracy, idiomatic equivalence, preservation of humorous effect, pragmatic appropriateness, and audiovisual suitability. Rather than reporting unverified empirical findings, it establishes a methodological basis for future corpus-based research into English–Uzbek audiovisual translation.

Key words: humor translation, idiomatic expressions, English–Uzbek translation, audiovisual translation, subtitling, dubbing, phraseology, pragmatic equivalence, wordplay, translation strategies.

1. Introduction

Humor is a complex communicative phenomenon that combines linguistic creativity, contextual interpretation, social knowledge, and cognitive processes. In everyday conversation, humor can strengthen interpersonal relationships, express criticism indirectly, establish group identity, or reduce social tension. In films and television programs, it also contributes to characterization, narrative development, and audience engagement.

Idiomatic expressions frequently participate in humorous communication. Expressions such as “spill the beans,” “break the ice,” and “cost an arm and a leg” have conventional meanings that cannot always be derived from their individual words. When such expressions appear in a humorous context, their figurative meanings may interact with literal interpretations, producing irony, ambiguity, exaggeration, or unexpected associations.

Translating humor and idioms from English into Uzbek requires more than finding a dictionary equivalent. The translator must determine what the expression means in context, why it is humorous, and how its communicative effect can be



reproduced for the target audience. An Uzbek expression may communicate the same general idea but differ in emotional tone, register, imagery, or comic potential.

These difficulties become especially apparent in audiovisual translation. Subtitles must be concise and readable, whereas dubbing requires dialogue that fits the timing and performance of the original scene. In both modes, the translator must coordinate verbal meaning with facial expressions, gestures, intonation, and the broader narrative context.

Research on humor translation has emphasized the interaction between linguistic structure, cultural knowledge, and communicative function. Zabalbeascoa (2005) discusses humor translation as an interdisciplinary field, while Chiaro (2008) examines the relationship between verbally expressed humor and translation. More recent research has systematically reviewed strategies used to translate verbally expressed humor in audiovisual products (Tong et al., 2024)¹.

Despite this growing body of research, English–Uzbek audiovisual translation remains a useful area for further investigation, particularly regarding how idiomatic meaning and humorous effect can be preserved simultaneously.

The aim of this article is to examine the principal linguistic and pragmatic challenges involved in translating humor and idiomatic expressions from English into Uzbek in audiovisual media.

The article addresses the following research questions:

1. What linguistic and pragmatic features make English humor and idiomatic expressions difficult to translate into Uzbek?
2. Which translation strategies may help preserve the meaning and humorous function of idiomatic expressions?
3. How do subtitling and dubbing constraints influence the translation of humorous dialogue?
4. What criteria can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative translations?

The article adopts a conceptual and qualitative approach. Its examples are illustrative rather than drawn from a newly collected empirical corpus.

Paraphrase replaces an idiomatic expression with a more direct explanation of its meaning.

For example, “He let the cat out of the bag” may be translated as “U sirni oshkor qilib qo‘ydi.”

Paraphrase can improve clarity when no suitable Uzbek idiom is available. Its main limitation is that it may remove the figurative imagery, rhythm, or informality of the original expression.

If the idiom is responsible for the humorous effect, paraphrase may need to be combined with another device to maintain the joke.

Cultural or functional substitution

¹ Attardo, S. (2001). *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*. Mouton de Gruyter.

Baker, M. (2018). *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (3rd ed.). Routledge.



Substitution involves replacing the source expression with a target-language expression that performs a comparable communicative function.

In humor translation, the replacement may differ substantially in wording while preserving the speaker's intention or the comic situation.

This strategy allows flexibility but requires careful judgment. An alternative that is humorous in Uzbek may introduce an unintended meaning or change the characterization of the speaker.

A successful substitution should preserve the relevant function of the original rather than simply introduce humor where none existed.

Creative adaptation

Creative adaptation involves restructuring an utterance to reproduce its humorous effect through a different linguistic mechanism.

This approach is particularly relevant to puns, rhyme, sound-based jokes, and idioms whose imagery cannot be transferred naturally.

For example, a joke based on two meanings of an English word may require an entirely different Uzbek joke using a word with multiple meanings. The translation may depart from the original wording while retaining the relationship between the dialogue and the scene².

Adaptation should nevertheless remain consistent with the plot, character, and communicative purpose of the original.

Omission; Omission involves leaving out an expression or part of a joke when it cannot be transferred effectively or when the subtitle must be shortened.

Although omission may sometimes be justified by time and space constraints, it can remove characterization, narrative information, or an important interaction between characters.

Before omitting a humorous expression, the translator should determine whether its function is repeated elsewhere in the scene or whether the visual context makes the information redundant.

Compensation; Compensation involves reproducing a lost stylistic or humorous effect elsewhere in the dialogue.

If an English pun cannot be recreated in its original position, a translator may introduce a different but contextually appropriate humorous expression later in the exchange.

Compensation can be valuable in dubbing and subtitling, but it requires attention to timing and narrative coherence. The added humor should not contradict the character's personality or alter the overall meaning of the scene.

The effectiveness of each strategy depends on the expression, the audiovisual context, and the intended audience. No single strategy can be considered optimal for all types of humor.

7. Subtitling and Dubbing Constraints

² Chiaro, D. (2008). Verbally expressed humor and translation. In V. Raskin (Ed.), *The Primer of Humor Research* (pp. 569–608). Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110198492.569>



Audiovisual translation introduces practical restrictions that are not always present in ordinary written translation.

Subtitling

Subtitles must be readable within a limited period and fit the available screen space. Long explanations of idioms may distract viewers from the visual action, while excessive compression can remove the elements necessary to understand a joke.

The translator therefore needs to identify the most important information and decide whether the idiomatic image, the figurative meaning, or the comic effect should receive priority.

For example, a brief Uzbek idiom may be more suitable than a lengthy literal explanation if both communicate the relevant meaning. However, when the joke depends on a specific word, replacing it with a general equivalent may make the scene incomprehensible.

Díaz Cintas and Remael's work on subtitling provides a useful framework for considering the linguistic and technical dimensions of this process.

Dubbing

Dubbing presents different constraints. The translated dialogue must fit the timing of the original speech and work with the actors' delivery, pauses, gestures, and performance.

A translation that reads naturally on the page may be difficult to speak within the available time. Similarly, an idiom that is semantically appropriate may have a rhythm or length that does not fit the scene.

Dubbing may allow more extensive reformulation than subtitles because the translation is delivered as spoken dialogue rather than displayed as written text. Nevertheless, the dialogue must remain coherent with the characters' actions and the visible scene.

Zolczer (2016), in a study of humor in audiovisual media, compares original, dubbed, and subtitled humorous scenes. This type of comparative design illustrates how the mode of translation can be incorporated into research on humor transfer.

Interaction between verbal and visual humor

Humor in audiovisual media is not always carried by language alone. A facial expression, physical action, sound effect, or visual object may contribute to the joke.

If the image already communicates part of the meaning, the subtitle may not need to explain it fully. Conversely, when the joke depends on a specific relationship between a word and an object on screen, the translator may need to preserve that relationship even if a more general idiom would otherwise be natural.

This multimodal perspective is essential when comparing subtitle and dubbing alternatives. Translation decisions should be evaluated within the scene rather than in isolated sentences.

Proposed Analytical Framework

To support future research, this article proposes a qualitative framework for evaluating translations of humor and idiomatic expressions.

Conclusion





The translation of humor and idiomatic expressions in English–Uzbek audiovisual media is a complex process that requires more than linguistic accuracy. Humor often depends on wordplay, cultural associations, shared knowledge, contextual expectations, and pragmatic meaning, while idioms frequently convey meanings that cannot be understood through the literal interpretation of their individual words. Consequently, direct translation may fail to preserve the intended humorous effect or communicative function.

This article has discussed the principal linguistic and pragmatic challenges involved in translating humor and idiomatic expressions, with particular attention to subtitling and dubbing. The theoretical discussion suggests that effective translation may require a combination of strategies, including functional equivalence, idiomatic substitution, paraphrase, compensation, and selective adaptation. The choice of strategy should depend on the type of humor or idiom, the audiovisual context, the target audience, and technical constraints such as subtitle length and synchronization.

An important principle is that successful translation does not always require reproducing the original wording. In many cases, preserving the intended effect, interpersonal meaning, or comic function is more important than maintaining the source text's formal structure. Nevertheless, adaptation should be carefully considered to avoid changing the speaker's intention or removing significant linguistic and cultural features.

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