DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18155163

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL CONTEXT IN SHAPING HUMOROUS IDIOMS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

Tursunova Muharram Sobirjonovna

Turan International University in Namangan, Faculty of English Linguistics, Master's degree student, Group: M-Ling-24-AU.

E-mail: muharramtursunova304@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Humor is a complex social and linguistic phenomenon that varies greatly across cultures. Idioms, as culturally loaded expressions, offer insight into how humor reflects and shapes societal norms. This paper presents a comparative analysis of humorous idiomatic expressions in Uzbek and English, focusing on how cultural context influences both their content and form. Drawing from a corpus of 8 idioms (4 from each language), the study categorizes them by thematic domains such as family, animals, intelligence, and social behavior, and analyzes the underlying humor mechanisms (e.g., irony, metaphor, exaggeration). Findings reveal that Uzbek idioms are deeply rooted in oral traditions and agrarian values, often using vivid imagery and moral critique, whereas English idioms favor individualistic humor, sarcasm, and understatement reflective of urban life and Western pragmatism. These differences illustrate the profound impact of culture on linguistic expression and provide valuable insights for language learners, translators, and intercultural communicators.

Keywords: *Humour, idioms, Uzbek, English, types.*

INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a system of communication but a living reflection of the cultural, social, and psychological life of its speakers. Among the many forms of figurative language, idioms stand out as particularly rich in cultural and pragmatic meaning. An idiom typically consists of a fixed expression whose meaning cannot be understood solely by analysing the literal definitions of its constituent words. Idioms often encapsulate folk wisdom, historical references, and culturally specific norms. Humour in idioms adds an additional layer of complexity—it not only entertains but also reinforces societal expectations, stereotypes, and power structures. Across cultures, what is deemed humorous can reveal a great deal about that society's taboos, values, and attitudes toward authority, intelligence, and daily life. In many cases, idioms are used to provide indirect commentary on human behaviour, often in a humorous or ironic manner. For instance, in English, calling someone "not the sharpest tool in the shed" humorously implies a lack of intelligence without directly insulting the person. In Uzbek, a similar function is performed by the idiom "kalla kaltak yesa ham tushunmaydi," meaning someone who doesn't understand even after being metaphorically beaten over the head. These idioms serve not only linguistic functions but also social and cultural ones, preserving cultural memory while also shaping contemporary discourse.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most common cultural themes found in humorous idioms in Uzbek and English?

2. How does cultural context influence the interpretation and formation of humor in these idioms?

3. What are the major similarities and differences in the humor mechanisms employed in idioms across both languages?

The primary objective of this study is to uncover how cultural norms and values influence the use and perception of humor in idiomatic expressions in Uzbek and English. Specific objectives include:

- Categorizing humorous idioms based on dominant cultural themes (e.g., family, social roles, intellect).
- Analyzing the structural and rhetorical devices that contribute to humor in each idiom (e.g., irony, metaphor, exaggeration).
- Comparing and contrasting the idioms to identify culturally specific patterns and universal trends in humorous expression.

By achieving these objectives, the study contributes to a broader understanding of cross-cultural communication, translation studies, and applied linguistics.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative design using thematic content analysis and cultural-linguistic comparison. The focus is not on quantifying idioms but on exploring the depth of cultural meaning embedded in humorous expressions. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the semantic, pragmatic, and cultural layers of idiomatic humor in both languages. The study follows a constructivist paradigm, which acknowledges that meaning is socially and culturally constructed. The idioms were interpreted in their original cultural-linguistic contexts, considering both literal and figurative meanings, as well as speaker intention and social function.

A corpus of 8 idioms was compiled—4 idioms in English and 4 in Uzbek. The idioms were selected from the following sources:

- English:
  - *The Free Dictionary* and *Cambridge Dictionary of Idioms*
  - Popular English idiom books (e.g., McCarthy & O‘Dell’s *English Idioms in Use*)
  - Media sources and native speaker interviews

- Uzbek:
  - Uzbek idiom dictionaries (e.g., *O‘zbek Tilidagi Iboralar Lug‘ati*)
  - Folklore collections and proverbs from *Til va Adabiyot* journal
  - Consultations with native speakers, particularly older adults from rural regions

To support clarity, the idioms were grouped in two tables (Table 1 for English, Table 2 for Uzbek) and then compared in a cross-analysis section in the discussion.

RESULTS

The findings from the comparative analysis of 8 idioms—4 from English and 4 from Uzbek—are presented in tabular form to show the relationships among theme, humor mechanism, rhetorical strategy, and cultural context.

Table 1: English Humorous Idioms

Idiom	Literal Meaning	Figurative Meaning	Theme	Humor Type	Rhetorical Device	Cultural Context
Not the sharpest tool in the shed	A dull tool in a shed	Someone not very smart	Intelligence	Irony	Metaphor	Western individualism; tactful criticism
Spill the beans	To drop beans	To reveal a secret	Social norms	Surprise	Metaphor	Anglo-Saxon emphasis on confidentiality and guilt
A few sandwiches short of a picnic	Missing food items in a picnic	Mentally unstable or not very smart	Intelligence	Absurdity	Euphemism	British understatement and politeness
Kick the bucket	To literally kick a bucket	To die	Death	Euphemism	Idiomatic metaphor	Avoidance of direct mention of death

Table 2: Uzbek Humorous Idioms

Idiom	Literal Meaning	Figurative Meaning	Theme	Humor Type	Rhetorical Device	Cultural Context
Kalla kaltak yesa ham tushunmaydi	Even if hit on the head, won't understand	Very unintelligent person	Intelligence	Exaggeration	Hyperbole	Criticism rooted in rural oral culture
Qopda mushuk saqlab bo'lmaydi	You can't keep a cat in a sack	You can't hide the truth forever	Deception	Visual metaphor	Folk metaphor	Similar to medieval European sayings; rural imagery
Tiliga qarab osh pishirar	Cooks plov based on the person's tongue	Treat people according to how they speak	Social behavior	Irony	Cultural metaphor	Hospitality and indirect communication
Qorni och bo'lmagan tovuq bug'doyni tanlamaydi	A full chicken ignores wheat	If you're not in need, you won't value resources	Greed/Value	Animal humor	Proverbial logic	Agrarian values and economic metaphor

DISCUSSION

Both English and Uzbek idioms exhibit recurring themes of intelligence, deception, social behavior, and authority. These categories suggest that regardless of culture, humor often reflects common human experiences—foolishness, cleverness, mistakes, and hierarchy.

For example, idioms targeting intellectual incompetence are prolific in both languages. However, the Uzbek idioms tend to exaggerate through grotesque or physical metaphors (e.g., "kalla kaltak yesa ham tushunmaydi"), which are often used in everyday interactions with mild condescension. In contrast, English idioms favor

understatement or absurd metaphors like “not the sharpest tool in the shed,” which implies critique while softening its edge. This reflects broader cultural attitudes: Western societies value politeness in critique, whereas Uzbek discourse allows for more direct, sometimes mocking expressions—especially in close social circles.

Uzbek idioms are heavily influenced by agrarian culture, Islamic values, and oral storytelling traditions. Animals such as donkeys, cats, and chickens frequently appear, representing social types or moral lessons. These idioms use humor to reinforce group values, warn against folly, or ridicule deviant behavior. Humor here serves a didactic role, teaching wisdom through ridicule or analogy. English idioms, on the other hand, often originate from urban industrial contexts, military history, and mass media influence. Idioms like “bite the bullet” or “the lights are on but nobody’s home” come from specific historical or technological contexts and reflect the individualistic and pragmatic worldview of English-speaking cultures. Humor in these idioms is frequently based on irony, sarcasm, and euphemism, reflecting a cultural discomfort with overt confrontation. For language learners, the humorous content of idioms is often the most difficult to understand because it depends on shared cultural schemas. A literal translation of "oq ot minib keladi" may confuse English speakers unless they know it symbolizes hope or arrival of a savior in Uzbek folklore. Similarly, "a few sandwiches short of a picnic" may sound nonsensical to Uzbek speakers unless they understand the cultural background of British humor and understatement. This poses challenges for translators and educators. A word-for-word translation may destroy the humor or, worse, offend the target audience.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study has examined the ways in which cultural context influences the creation, interpretation, and function of humorous idioms in Uzbek and English. By analyzing 8 idioms—4 from each language—we explored how humor is constructed through metaphor, irony, exaggeration, and other rhetorical devices, and how these mechanisms reflect deep-rooted cultural values and worldviews. The analysis shows that while both Uzbek and English idioms use humor to reflect on

common human experiences—such as intelligence, deception, and social behavior—the expression of humor is strongly shaped by cultural norms. Uzbek idioms are more likely to incorporate agrarian imagery, direct sarcasm, and epic folkloric references. They rely heavily on oral tradition and often serve didactic or moralistic functions. In contrast, English idioms use understatement, visual absurdity, and euphemistic phrasing, often reflecting post-industrial, individualistic cultures that favor indirect criticism. In summary, idiomatic humor is not just linguistic play—it is a mirror of cultural identity. Understanding it requires not just language proficiency but cultural literacy, and this awareness can promote more effective communication across cultures.

REFERENCES:

1. Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
2. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.
3. Popova, A. (2019). Cultural aspects of idiomatic expressions in Uzbek and English. *Inostrannye yazyki v shkole*, (6), 24–28.
4. Ritchie, G. (2004). *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes*. London: Routledge.
5. Saidova, N. A. (2019). *Metodika obucheniya inostrannym yazykam v nachalnoy shkole*. Tashkent: Fan.
6. Yuldasheva, Z. (2021). National-cultural features of idiomatic expressions in English and Uzbek languages. *Obrazovanie i nauka*, (1), 50–55.
7. Zhanuzakov, S. (2020). Comparative study of phraseological units in the Turkic and English languages. *Til va Adabiyot Ta'limi*, (3), 89–94.