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PRESERVING HUMOUR IN AI-GENERATED AND HUMAN TRANSLATIONS OF ENGLISH JOKES

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Abstract. This article explores the preservation of humour in artificial intelligence-generated and human translations of English jokes into Uzbek. It focuses on the translation of wordplay, irony, ambiguity, cultural references, and unexpected punchlines. A comparative analytical framework is used to examine how translation choices affect semantic accuracy, naturalness, implicit meaning, and the relationship between the setup and the punchline. Particular attention is paid to contextual interpretation, cultural adaptation, compensation, and creative reformulation in recreating humorous effects. The discussion considers the potential strengths and limitations of both AI-generated and human translations, including literal rendering, excessive explanation, and shifts in cultural meaning.

Keywords: humour preservation, joke translation, artificial intelligence, human translation, cultural adaptation, pragmatic equivalence.

Introduction: The translation of humour presents a particular challenge because comic meaning often depends on more than the explicit content of an utterance. English jokes may draw on lexical ambiguity, idiomatic expressions, irony, cultural references, and unexpected shifts in interpretation. When translated into Uzbek, these features require attention to both linguistic differences and the background knowledge that enables readers to recognise the intended humour.

The availability of artificial intelligence systems introduces additional possibilities for translating humorous texts. AI-generated versions can provide alternative expressions and serve as material for subsequent revision. However, a grammatically acceptable translation does not necessarily preserve a joke's humorous mechanism. A version may communicate the situation accurately while removing ambiguity, revealing the punchline prematurely, or overlooking an implied evaluation. Human translations also require critical assessment, since excessive adaptation or explanation can alter the original meaning and weaken its effect.

Comparing AI-generated and human translations therefore requires clearly defined criteria. Fluency and semantic accuracy are relevant, but humour preservation also involves maintaining the relationship between the setup and the punchline, recognising implicit meanings, and selecting culturally accessible expressions. These considerations make humour translation a useful area for examining the interaction between automated language generation and human interpretive judgement.

This article discusses the preservation of humour in AI-generated and human translations of English jokes into Uzbek. It considers the translation problems associated with wordplay, irony, and cultural references, and examines strategies that may support the recreation of comic effect. The discussion is conceptual and uses illustrative translation alternatives; it does not report an experiment comparing outputs from a specified AI system with translations produced by human participants.

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Main part: Humour preservation can be understood as the recreation of textual conditions that allow target readers to recognise a humorous interpretation. These conditions include the development of an expectation, the introduction of an incongruous element, and the availability of clues that make the incongruity interpretable. In a short joke, the final phrase may change the meaning of everything that precedes it. Translation consequently involves preserving the organisation of information as well as its semantic content.

An important distinction must be made between translating a joke's topic and translating its humorous mechanism. A text about a school, workplace, or family can remain understandable after translation even when its comic element disappears. This is particularly noticeable when an English word has several meanings that are expressed by different words in Uzbek. A translation may retain each individual reference but fail to reproduce the connection responsible for the joke. For example, consider the exchange: "Why did you bring a ladder to school?" – "Because I wanted to go to high school." The humour connects the established educational expression high school with the spatial meaning of high. A literal rendering such as "Nega maktabga narvon olib kelding?" – "Chunki yuqori maktabga bormoqchi edim" does not establish the same natural ambiguity in Uzbek. The difficulty concerns a mismatch between the lexical resources of the two languages.

One possible adaptation is: "Nega maktabga narvon olib kelding?" – "Ustozim: 'Bilimingni yuksaltir', degandi." Here, the figurative expression bilimni yuksaltirmoq is interpreted as physical upward movement. The adaptation preserves a related humorous mechanism, although it changes the immediate meaning and adds a teacher's instruction. This alternative illustrates compensation and reformulation. Either an AI system or a human translator could propose such a solution; its quality should be assessed through the resulting text rather than assumed from its origin.

Irony presents a different challenge because its interpretation depends on the relationship between an utterance and its context. Consider the illustrative exchange: "You're only an hour late." – "The traffic was terrible." – "Of course. Your punctuality is legendary." The final sentence appears complimentary, but the preceding reference to lateness establishes a critical interpretation. A possible Uzbek version is: "Atigi bir soat kechikding." – "Yo'lda tirbandlik dahshat edi." – "Albatta. Vaqtida kelishingga gap yo'q-da!" This rendering uses a familiar evaluative expression to maintain praise as the surface form of criticism.

In comparing AI-generated and human versions of this example, the relevant question would be whether the translation preserves the contrast between apparent approval and actual disapproval. An explicit version such as "Sen doim kechikasan" communicates criticism but removes the ironic form. Conversely, an overly formal translation may retain the dictionary meanings while sounding inconsistent with the conversational setting. These alternatives demonstrate why contextual interpretation and stylistic appropriateness should be evaluated together.

Implicit meaning is equally significant. In the exchange "My boss says I'm irreplaceable." – "That's wonderful!" – "Nobody else wants my job," the opening statement invites a favourable interpretation of the employee's abilities. The punchline then introduces a different explanation for being irreplaceable. The Uzbek version "Boshlig'im: 'Sening o'rningni hech kim bosolmaydi', deydi." – "Zo'r-ku!" – "Ishimni

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qilishni boshqa hech kim xohlamaydi" retains this interpretive reversal without extensive adaptation.

The example shows that creative rewriting is not necessary for every joke. Where the underlying inference is accessible in both languages, a relatively direct translation may preserve the humorous structure. Additional explanations about difficult working conditions or low pay would introduce information absent from the original and reduce the openness of its implied criticism. Both AI-generated and human translations should therefore be examined for unnecessary explicitation.

Cultural references introduce further considerations. A joke may presuppose familiarity with an institution, public figure, social convention, or everyday practice. Retaining an unfamiliar reference can make the punchline difficult to interpret, while replacing it with an Uzbek reference may change the social setting or evaluative target. Cultural adaptation should therefore be justified by the role of the reference in producing humour. A reference essential to the identity of a character or community requires different treatment from a replaceable detail used only to establish a familiar situation.

These translation problems suggest several criteria for a meaningful comparison. Semantic accuracy concerns whether the essential situation and relationships are retained. Linguistic naturalness concerns whether the Uzbek dialogue is idiomatic and appropriate to the speakers. Humorous structure concerns the connection between the setup and the punchline. Pragmatic interpretation concerns the accessibility of irony, implied criticism, and other unstated meanings. Cultural accessibility concerns whether readers possess, or can infer, the knowledge needed to understand the joke.

A rigorous empirical comparison would also require consistent procedures. The AI system, version, prompts, generation dates, and revision conditions should be documented. Human translators' relevant experience and access to contextual information should likewise be specified. If AI output receives human revision, that version should be evaluated separately from the unedited output. Otherwise, differences attributed to AI or human translation may actually reflect unequal instructions or editing opportunities.

Textual assessment can identify whether a translation retains ambiguity or delays an interpretive reversal, but it cannot establish how amusing readers find the result. Reader-response research would therefore complement close analysis. Uzbek readers could assess comprehensibility, naturalness, and perceived humorousness without being told which versions were produced by AI or humans. Such a design would help distinguish textual plausibility from demonstrated audience response. Human revision offers a practical way to examine and improve AI-generated alternatives. Revision can address unnatural phrasing, lost ambiguity, excessive explanation, and inappropriate cultural substitutions. Nevertheless, its effectiveness should be demonstrated through comparison rather than presumed. The central issue is whether the revised version creates a clearer and more coherent path to the humorous interpretation while retaining the relevant meanings of the source.

Conclusion: The preservation of humour in English–Uzbek joke translation requires attention to linguistic meaning, contextual inference, cultural knowledge, and the organisation of the punchline. Wordplay may require compensation or reformulation, whereas irony and implicit evaluation may be preserved through contextually appropriate expressions and carefully controlled information order.

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AI-generated and human translations should be assessed according to the same explicit criteria. Neither fluency nor translator identity alone establishes that humour has been retained. The illustrative discussion indicates that direct translation, creative adaptation, and human revision each have potential value when their use responds to a specific translation problem.

Because this article presents a conceptual discussion rather than an empirical comparison, it does not establish the superiority of either AI-generated or human translation. Further research using documented translation procedures, authentic joke collections, and reader-response assessment is needed to determine how effectively different versions communicate humour to Uzbek audiences.

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