

**TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL RELATIONS: PROBLEMS OF
CONVEYING JOKES AND IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS FROM ENGLISH TO
RUSSIAN. PRACTICAL RESEARCH, EXPERIMENTS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS ON TRANSLATION.**

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Abstract The translation of culturally marked linguistic units, particularly jokes and idiomatic expressions, represents one of the most complex challenges in intercultural communication. This article investigates the problems associated with translating humor and idioms from English into Russian, emphasizing cultural asymmetry, pragmatic meaning, and linguistic non-equivalence. The study is based on qualitative comparative analysis and practical translation experiments involving authentic English-language materials. The findings indicate that literal translation strategies are largely ineffective in preserving humorous intent and idiomatic meaning, while functional, adaptive, and culturally informed approaches yield more communicatively successful results. The article proposes a set of methodological recommendations aimed at enhancing translation adequacy and intercultural equivalence, contributing to contemporary debates in translation theory and practice.

Keywords: humor translation, idiomatic expressions, intercultural communication, English–Russian translation, functional equivalence, cultural adaptation

Introduction

In the context of globalization, translation has become a critical tool for facilitating intercultural communication and maintaining cultural dialogue between societies. However, translation is not merely a process of linguistic substitution; it is a complex act of cultural mediation. Among the most challenging elements to translate are jokes and idiomatic expressions, which are deeply embedded in cultural knowledge, shared assumptions, and social conventions.

English and Russian represent distinct linguistic and cultural systems with different historical backgrounds, humor traditions, and communicative norms. English humor often relies on irony, understatement, ambiguity, and wordplay, while Russian humor is frequently characterized by expressiveness, situational context, and sociopolitical undertones. Idiomatic expressions in both languages encode culturally specific experiences and collective worldviews, making direct equivalence rare.

The aim of this article is to examine the major linguistic and cultural problems encountered in translating jokes and idiomatic expressions from English into Russian. The study also seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of different translation strategies through practical experiments and to develop evidence-based recommendations for professional translators and researchers.

Methods

1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative contrastive research design grounded in contemporary translation theory, particularly functionalist, pragmatic, and cultural approaches. The research integrates theoretical analysis with practical translation experimentation.

2 Data Collection

The corpus for analysis includes:

English jokes and idiomatic expressions extracted from literary works, films, television series, stand-up comedy, and everyday discourse. Official Russian translations and alternative translations produced during experimental tasks. The selected materials represent various genres and communicative settings to ensure diversity of linguistic and cultural contexts.

3 Translation Experiments

A series of translation experiments was conducted, in which identical source texts were translated using different strategies:

- literal translation,
- idiomatic equivalence,
- functional (dynamic) equivalence,
- cultural substitution,
- paraphrasing and explicitation.

Each translation was evaluated according to semantic accuracy, pragmatic effect, cultural acceptability, and preservation of humor.

4 Analytical Framework

The analysis is based on:

- comparative semantic analysis,
- pragmatic interpretation,
- reader-oriented evaluation.

The results were interpreted using established concepts in translation studies, including equivalence, domestication and foreignization, and translator visibility.

Results

1 Translation of Jokes

The analysis revealed that jokes relying on linguistic wordplay, such as puns and homophones, posed the greatest difficulty. In most cases, literal translation led to complete loss of humorous effect. Successful translations required creative reformulation or substitution with culturally appropriate humor.

Jokes based on cultural references (e.g., social stereotypes, institutions, or popular culture) were also problematic. When translators failed to account for cultural distance, the joke became obscure or misleading for Russian readers.

2 Translation of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions demonstrated a high degree of non-equivalence. Literal translations often resulted in unnatural or semantically distorted expressions. Translations employing Russian idiomatic counterparts or functional paraphrasing proved more effective in preserving meaning and stylistic tone.

3 Strategy Effectiveness

The experimental results showed that:

- literal translation had the lowest communicative success;
- functional equivalence achieved the highest level of reader comprehension;
- cultural substitution was effective but risked cultural loss if overused.

Overall, strategies prioritizing communicative effect over formal similarity were more successful.

Discussion

The findings confirm that the translation of humor and idioms is fundamentally a cultural and pragmatic task, not merely a linguistic one. The inadequacy of literal translation supports functionalist theories, which argue that translation quality should be assessed based on target audience reception rather than structural fidelity.

The study highlights the translator's role as an intercultural mediator who must negotiate between source-text loyalty and target-culture expectations. This creative responsibility raises ethical and methodological questions regarding the limits of adaptation and the preservation of cultural identity.

The results also have pedagogical implications, suggesting that translator training should place greater emphasis on cultural competence, pragmatic awareness, and creative problem-solving skills.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that translating jokes and idiomatic expressions from English into Russian involves complex linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic challenges. The research confirms that literal translation is generally ineffective, while functional and adaptive strategies better preserve communicative intent and humorous impact.

Based on theoretical analysis and practical experiments, the article recommends that translators:

- prioritize pragmatic equivalence and audience response,
- develop deep cultural awareness of both source and target languages,
- employ creative strategies while maintaining contextual fidelity.

Future research may expand this study through corpus-based analysis, quantitative reader-response experiments, or comparative studies involving additional language pairs.

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