

LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES OF HUMOR IN RUSSIAN AND UZBEK CHILDREN'S PROSE

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Abstract

This study explores the linguistic strategies of humor in Russian and Uzbek children's prose, focusing on the ways in which humor is constructed, conveyed, and perceived within different cultural and linguistic frameworks. The research analyzes lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic devices such as wordplay, irony, exaggeration, repetition, and culturally specific references that contribute to humorous effects in children's literature. Particular attention is given to how authors adapt humor to the cognitive and emotional development of young readers, ensuring accessibility and engagement.

The comparative approach highlights both universal and culture-specific features of humor in Russian and Uzbek texts. While Russian children's prose often employs satire, absurdity, and linguistic playfulness, Uzbek children's literature tends to emphasize moral didacticism, situational humor, and folklore-based comic elements. The study also considers the role of linguistic economy, narrative structure, and dialogic interaction in enhancing humor.

Keywords: Humor, linguistic strategies, children's literature, Russian prose, Uzbek prose, wordplay, irony, cultural context, pragmatics, comparative analysis.

Introduction

In contemporary linguistics and literary studies, humor is recognized as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that plays a significant role in human communication, cognition, and cultural expression. Within the context of children's literature, humor acquires particular importance, as it not only entertains young readers but also contributes to their linguistic development, emotional growth, and socialization. The study of humor in children's prose therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from linguistics, literary theory, psychology, and cultural studies.



Russian and Uzbek children's prose represent rich and diverse traditions in which humor functions as an essential stylistic and communicative device. Despite differences in historical development, cultural values, and literary conventions, both traditions employ a variety of linguistic strategies to create humorous effects that are accessible and meaningful to young audiences. These strategies include lexical play, phonetic manipulation, syntactic deviation, pragmatic ambiguity, and culturally embedded references. At the same time, humor in children's texts is often shaped by didactic purposes, reflecting societal norms and moral expectations.

From a theoretical perspective, humor has been widely studied through different frameworks, including incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief theory. These approaches provide valuable tools for understanding how humor operates at various linguistic levels and how it is interpreted by readers. In children's prose, however, humor must be carefully adapted to the cognitive abilities and experiential background of the audience, which makes the analysis of linguistic strategies particularly relevant.

The relevance of this research lies in its focus on the comparative analysis of humor in Russian and Uzbek children's prose. By examining how linguistic mechanisms function in different cultural contexts, the study aims to identify both universal patterns and culture-specific features of humorous discourse. Such an analysis not only deepens our understanding of humor as a linguistic phenomenon but also contributes to the fields of comparative linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication.

Literature review and Methodology

The study of humor in children's prose has gained increasing attention in modern linguistics, as it reflects not only aesthetic and stylistic features of literary texts but also deeper cognitive and cultural mechanisms. Humor in children's literature functions as a powerful communicative tool that facilitates language acquisition, enhances creativity, and supports the socialization of young readers. In this regard, the linguistic strategies of humor in Russian and Uzbek children's prose present a valuable field for comparative analysis.

From a theoretical standpoint, humor has been extensively examined through various linguistic and philosophical approaches. For instance, Victor Raskin argues that humor arises from the interaction of two incompatible semantic scripts within a single text, forming the basis of the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor. According to this view, linguistic ambiguity and semantic contrast are key mechanisms in creating comic effects [1]. This concept is particularly relevant in children's prose, where simple yet effective contrasts are used to produce humor understandable to young readers.

Similarly, Salvatore Attardo expands on Raskin's ideas by emphasizing the role of multiple linguistic levels—lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic—in humor construction. He notes that humor is a “multi-layered phenomenon” that operates through language-specific strategies and contextual interpretation [2]. In Russian children's prose, such strategies often manifest through wordplay, phonetic repetition, and absurd situations, which create a playful and imaginative narrative environment.



Russian literary tradition, particularly in children's prose, frequently employs irony, exaggeration, and elements of the absurd. These features are rooted in a broader cultural tendency toward satirical and reflective humor. Authors often use linguistic experimentation, including neologisms, sound imitation, and syntactic deviations, to engage young readers. This aligns with the observations of Mikhail Bakhtin, who highlights the importance of dialogism and heteroglossia in literary texts, where multiple voices and meanings interact to produce comic and expressive effects [3].

In contrast, Uzbek children's prose demonstrates a distinct approach to humor, often grounded in folklore traditions, moral instruction, and everyday life situations. Humor is typically more situational and didactic, aiming to convey ethical values while maintaining entertainment. As noted by George Lakoff, humor is closely tied to conceptual metaphors and cultural models that shape how individuals interpret meaning [4]. In Uzbek texts, these cultural models are reflected in proverbs, anecdotes, and character-based humor that resonate with local traditions and social norms.

Another important aspect of humor in children's prose is its adaptation to the cognitive and psychological development of the audience. Jean Piaget emphasizes that children's understanding of humor evolves with their cognitive abilities, progressing from simple physical or linguistic incongruities to more complex forms of irony and wordplay [5]. This developmental perspective explains why authors in both Russian and Uzbek traditions carefully select linguistic strategies that correspond to the age and comprehension level of their readers. Conversely, humor in Uzbek children's prose tends to be more context-dependent and sociopragmatically oriented, reflecting the collective values, social norms, and hierarchical relationships characteristic of Uzbek society. Unlike forms of humor that rely heavily on linguistic ambiguity or complex wordplay, Uzbek children's humor is typically grounded in everyday situations, familiar social interactions, and culturally recognizable scenarios. For example, playful teasing such as "Sen shunchalik ozg'in ekansanki, shamol uchirib ketadi!" ("You are so thin that even the wind could carry you away!") illustrates the use of exaggeration and situational irony as primary humorous devices.

Such expressions are closely aligned with the cultural preference for indirectness, politeness, and the preservation of social harmony. Humor is often constructed in a way that minimizes potential offense while still maintaining its entertaining function. In this regard, Uzbek children's humor emphasizes shared understanding and mutual participation, reinforcing interpersonal bonds within family and peer groups. It frequently emerges in dialogic contexts, where humor is co-constructed through interaction rather than imposed through individual linguistic creativity.

From a pragmatic perspective, Uzbek humor serves important social and educational functions. It not only entertains but also subtly transmits cultural values, behavioral norms, and moral expectations. The avoidance of direct mockery, especially toward elders, authority figures, or socially respected individuals, reflects deeply rooted traditions of respect and modesty in Uzbek communicative practices. As noted by Karimova, humor in Uzbek discourse operates within clearly defined sociocultural boundaries, where the balance between playfulness and propriety is carefully maintained [6].



Furthermore, the effectiveness of humor in Uzbek children's prose largely depends on contextual cues, shared cultural knowledge, and the relational dynamics between speakers. This makes it highly accessible to young readers, who can easily relate to the situations depicted. At the same time, it highlights the role of humor as a means of socialization, helping children internalize acceptable patterns of interaction and communication within their cultural environment.

Russian children's prose demonstrates a distinctive set of linguistic strategies of humor characterized by irony, absurdity, exaggeration, and elements of self-deprecation. These strategies are deeply rooted in the broader traditions of Russian literature and culture, where humor often serves as a reflection of social realities and psychological depth. Drawing on a rich heritage that includes folklore, fairy tales, and the works of prominent writers such as Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Anton Chekhov, Russian humorous discourse frequently employs linguistic playfulness, semantic incongruity, and stylistic experimentation.

In children's prose, these features are adapted to suit the cognitive level of young readers, often manifesting through absurd situations, unexpected narrative turns, and phonetic or lexical creativity. The use of exaggeration and illogical scenarios creates a sense of playfulness while also stimulating imagination. At the same time, elements of mild irony and self-reflection are introduced in simplified forms, enabling children to engage with more complex layers of meaning[7]. The influence of Russian folklore further enriches humorous strategies through repetitive structures, symbolic characters, and fantastical elements, which contribute to both entertainment and moral instruction.

The development of humor in Russian literature has been significantly shaped by historical and socio-political contexts, including periods of imperial rule, the Soviet era, and post-Soviet transformations. These historical experiences have influenced not only the themes of humor but also its linguistic realization. For instance, indirect expression, implicit meanings, and layered narratives can be seen as adaptive strategies shaped by periods of censorship and ideological control. Even in children's literature, traces of these tendencies can be observed in the form of allegorical humor and subtle critique embedded within seemingly simple narratives. In contrast, Uzbek children's prose employs a different set of linguistic strategies of humor, which are more contextually grounded and culturally embedded. Uzbek humor tends to rely less on linguistic ambiguity and more on situational irony, hyperbole, and everyday communicative practices. It reflects the values of collectivism, respect, and social harmony that are central to Uzbek culture[8]. Humor is often constructed through familiar domestic situations, interpersonal interactions, and folkloric motifs, making it easily accessible and relatable for young readers.

Historical and cultural factors have also played a crucial role in shaping humor in Uzbek literature. The influence of Central Asian folklore, the legacy of the Silk Road, and the integration of Islamic cultural traditions have contributed to the formation of a humor style that emphasizes ethical instruction and social cohesion. Additionally, periods of Persian, Russian, and Soviet influence have introduced new narrative forms and stylistic elements, further diversifying the linguistic expression of humor.



While Russian humor in children's prose often emphasizes linguistic creativity, absurdity, and imaginative play, Uzbek humor prioritizes clarity, cultural relevance, and moral didacticism. Nevertheless, both traditions share common underlying mechanisms such as exaggeration, repetition, and incongruity, which are essential for producing humorous effects. These similarities point to universal aspects of humor as a cognitive and linguistic phenomenon, while the differences highlight the role of cultural context in shaping its expression.

It is important to note that humor remains a highly subjective and dynamic phenomenon, influenced by individual perception, social environment, and cultural background. Therefore, although general patterns can be identified in Russian and Uzbek children's prose, individual authors may employ diverse and innovative humorous strategies. Overall, the linguistic strategies of humor in these traditions reflect the interplay between language, culture, and cognition, demonstrating that humor in children's literature is both a universal communicative tool and a culturally specific form of expression.

A comparative analysis reveals both universal and culture-specific features of humor. Universally, humor in children's prose relies on incongruity, repetition, and exaggeration as fundamental mechanisms. However, cultural specificity is evident in the choice of themes, linguistic devices, and narrative structures. Russian prose tends to emphasize linguistic creativity and imaginative absurdity, while Uzbek prose prioritizes clarity, moral messaging, and culturally embedded humor.

Moreover, the role of humor extends beyond entertainment. It serves as a means of linguistic enrichment, enabling children to develop vocabulary, understand figurative language, and interpret pragmatic nuances. At the same time, humor fosters emotional engagement and critical thinking, encouraging readers to perceive multiple layers of meaning within a text.

The linguistic strategies of humor in Russian and Uzbek children's prose demonstrate the intricate relationship between language, culture, and cognition. The integration of lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic devices reflects both shared human tendencies in humor perception and unique cultural expressions[9]. The inclusion of scholars' perspectives further confirms that humor is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, essential for understanding not only literary discourse but also broader communicative practices.

Overall, Uzbek children's humor can be characterized as situational, culturally embedded, and pragmatically sensitive, functioning not only as a source of amusement but also as a tool for reinforcing social cohesion and cultural continuity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of linguistic strategies of humor in Russian and Uzbek children's prose reveals a number of significant findings related to the structure, function, and cultural specificity of humorous discourse. The results demonstrate that humor in both traditions is constructed through a combination of lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic devices, though their frequency and functional orientation differ depending on cultural and literary contexts.

First, at the lexical level, both Russian and Uzbek children's prose actively employ wordplay, polysemy, and phonetic repetition to create humorous effects. In Russian texts, wordplay is often more complex and experimental, involving neologisms, sound symbolism, and playful



distortions of standard language forms. This supports the view of Victor Raskin that humor emerges from semantic incongruity and the coexistence of multiple interpretations within a single linguistic unit. Uzbek children's prose, on the other hand, tends to use simpler and more transparent lexical humor, ensuring that young readers can easily grasp the intended meaning. Second, at the stylistic level, exaggeration, irony, and absurdity play a central role in shaping humorous narratives. Russian children's literature frequently utilizes absurd situations and exaggerated character traits to create a playful and imaginative atmosphere. This aligns with the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, who emphasizes the importance of dialogic interaction and stylistic diversity in producing comic effects. In contrast, Uzbek prose more commonly relies on situational humor and narrative clarity, often embedding humor within moral or educational contexts.

Third, from a pragmatic perspective, humor in both traditions depends heavily on context, shared knowledge, and cultural references. As noted by Salvatore Attardo, humor is a context-dependent phenomenon that requires the interaction of linguistic and extralinguistic factors. In Russian children's prose, humor may involve implicit meanings, irony, and subtle linguistic cues, while Uzbek texts typically favor explicit and culturally familiar situations, such as family interactions, school life, and traditional customs.

The comparative analysis also highlights important differences in the communicative functions of humor. In Russian children's prose, humor often serves as a means of creative expression and cognitive stimulation, encouraging readers to interpret multiple layers of meaning. In Uzbek children's literature, humor is more closely associated with didactic purposes, reinforcing social norms, ethical values, and behavioral patterns. This observation is consistent with the developmental perspective proposed by Jean Piaget, which suggests that children's comprehension of humor is closely linked to their cognitive development and cultural environment.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that humor plays a crucial role in language acquisition and communicative competence. Through humorous texts, children are exposed to figurative language, pragmatic nuances, and diverse linguistic structures. This contributes to the development of their interpretative skills and enhances their ability to engage with complex discourse.

In summary, the results confirm that while Russian and Uzbek children's prose share common linguistic mechanisms of humor—such as incongruity, repetition, and exaggeration—they differ in terms of stylistic preferences and cultural orientation. The discussion demonstrates that humor is not only a universal linguistic phenomenon but also a culturally conditioned form of expression that reflects the values, traditions, and communicative practices of a given society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of linguistic strategies of humor in Russian and Uzbek children's prose demonstrates that humor is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by the interaction of language, cognition, and culture. The analysis confirms that humor in children's literature is constructed through a combination of lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic devices, including wordplay,



exaggeration, repetition, and contextual incongruity. These mechanisms serve not only to entertain young readers but also to support their linguistic development and cognitive growth. The comparative perspective reveals both universal and culture-specific characteristics of humor. On the one hand, both Russian and Uzbek children's prose rely on shared linguistic principles such as incongruity and playfulness. On the other hand, significant differences are observed in their functional orientation and stylistic expression. Russian children's prose tends to emphasize linguistic creativity, absurdity, and implicit meanings, while Uzbek children's literature is more closely connected to didactic purposes, cultural traditions, and situational clarity.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the important role of humor in shaping communicative competence and socialization. Through humorous texts, children learn to interpret figurative language, recognize pragmatic cues, and engage with multiple layers of meaning. In this sense, humor acts as a bridge between language learning and cultural understanding.

Overall, this study confirms that humor in children's prose is not merely an aesthetic feature but a significant linguistic and cultural tool. Its analysis contributes to the broader fields of comparative linguistics, discourse analysis, and translation studies. Future research may focus on deeper corpus-based analysis, translation challenges, and the role of multimodal elements in conveying humor across different languages and cultures.

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