

DOI <https://doi.org/10.36074/Lingua.issue2.003>

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Порівняльний аналіз англійського та американського гумору в літературному дискурсі

АНОТАЦІЯ. Статтю присвячено дослідженню гумору як різновиду комічного в літературному дискурсі. Визначено склад традиційної парадигми різновидів комічного, до якої входять гумор, іронія, сатира, сарказм. Описано провідні прийоми та мовні/мовленнєві засоби репрезентації та посилення комічного ефекту в художньому дискурсі. Розглянуто основи їх комплексного опису. Проаналізовано поняття «гумору» з точки зору гумору як лінгвістичного та соціокультурного явища в літературному дискурсі. Увагу зосереджено на дослідженні особливостей британського та американського гумору. Авторки простежують відмінності англійського та американського гумору в українських та зарубіжних лінгвістичних і літературознавчих джерелах. Виявлено особливості самого лінгвістичного критерію, який має важливе значення для ідентифікації та вивчення гумору як різновиду комічного лінгвістами. Висвітлено провідні класифікації вербальних засобів, форм і прийомів гумору в художньому дискурсі. Встановлено, що гумор в англійців має тенденцію проявлятися переважно під час особистих труднощів і бути значною мірою самоспрямованим, а найважливішою рисою американського гумору є використання сленгу, який притаманний лише американцям.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: гумор; комічний ефект; художній дискурс; лінгвосоціокультурний феномен; англійський гумор; американський гумор; мовні засоби.

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Comparative analysis of English and American humor in literary discourse

ABSTRACT. The article studies humor as a type of comic in the literary discourse. The composition of the traditional comic variety paradigm is determined, including humor, irony, satire, and sarcasm. The leading techniques and linguistic/speech means of representing and enhancing the comic effect in the literary discourse are described. The essentials of their complex description are considered. The concept of humor is analyzed as a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon in the literary discourse. Attention is focused on investigating the peculiarities of British and American humor. The authors trace the differences between English and American humor in domestic and foreign linguistic and literary sources. The peculiarities of the linguistic criterion itself are revealed, which is essential in linguists' identification and study of humor as a kind of comic. The leading classifications of verbal means, forms, and techniques of humorous wit in the literary discourse are highlighted. Humor among the English tends to manifest itself mainly in times of personal hardship and to be largely self-directed. The most crucial feature of American humor is slang, which is peculiar only to Americans.

KEYWORDS: *humor; comic effect; literary discourse; linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon; English humor; American humor; language means.*

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Problem statement. During the last decade, due to the expansion of international professional contacts and more fluent information exchange, many-sided and systematic communication on the international level became a marked tendency of all countries. Knowledge of foreign languages allows for making educational, cultural, and professional contacts. Thus, studying English as the leading international language is essential nowadays. Humor, as a multifaceted phenomenon, can be both the object and the means of teaching. It can be regarded and investigated as an integral part of British society and an effective means of bringing up a personality.

Though English and American people share one language, their humor is separated by several peculiarities resulting from their sociocultural development. The English and Americans use much humor, as evidenced by the incredible number of humorous films, publications, and radio comedy shows. What is typical for both countries is their love for practical jokes, puns, understated quips, and parodies (burlesque) [2, p. 215].

Humor application at higher educational institutions is an essential part of teaching English because by studying peculiarities of English and American humor, the learners of foreign languages are ready to enter the system of international and world cultures and behave naturally in British or American societies. English humor is an integral part of British and American society, so its knowledge is necessary for learners of English as a second language [1].

Analysis of research and publications. The following national and foreign linguists carried out the research in the field of humor: I. K. Kobyakova, D. V. Kazakova, V.E. Krasnopolskyi, N. F. Khairulina, L. Leacock Stephen, E. Mintz, L. F.L Nilsen Don, S. Scobie, etc. The research is based on texts of different stylistic and genre orientations and presented in the original.

The aim of the work. The article aims to provide a multidimensional view of humor as a comic to analyze humor as a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon in literary discourse. One of the objectives is to analyze the primary language means used in humorous discourse. For

sure, humor always requires language. Language is an approximation of thoughts through symbolic manipulation, and the gap between the expectations inherent in those symbols and the breaking of those expectations leads to laughter. In other words, a common explanation is that humor is based on surprise.

Presentation of the primary material. Nowadays, a significant number of theories concerning humor exist. It is regarded as a linguistic, social, and cultural phenomenon. Besides, it is the object of psychology, medicine, and philosophy investigation. Jokes are often based on bending the rules of logic and common sense (especially on punch lines). Jokes connect new elements and make associations one could not make in nature. This helps to make people's banks of knowledge grow.

Humor is an integral part of life in all nations. Nevertheless, cultural characteristics greatly influence the peculiarities of humor in every country. Every nation considers its humor entirely superior and either refuses to admit it or reluctantly admits the humorous qualities of other people. The thing is that understanding of humor lies in three factors: the situation of communication, the sender, and the receiver of the message. The result of a humorous act is finding out the level of understanding of the participants of the situation.

Three schemes are essential for understanding: cognitive, formal, and emotional. Cognitive schemes are necessary for understanding the semantics of an utterance. Mastering formal schemes, one can distinguish the genre of the humorous discourse (the primary genre is a joke). Emotional schemes are essential for creating a particular mood, which helps get a person ready for humorous intercourse. Emotional schemes are more important for understanding humorous discourse than other types of discourse. Because humor is connected with emotional communication, emotional state is often determinant for understanding humorous utterances.

Misunderstanding of humorous text in a foreign language may occur not only because of the absence of correspondence of some things in different cultures or because of unawareness of the norms of behavior in another culture but also because of some language peculiarities. There

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are several groups of mechanisms for creating comic effect: phonetic – spoonerisms, shifting stress or changing the intonation; lexical – comparison, homonymy, renewed idioms and, finally, syntactical means – a wrong syntactic connection and the use of parallel syntactical constructions [4].

Let us consider the main peculiar features of English and American humor in literary discourse. A practical joke is a prank or trick usually intended to make the victim appear foolish. In popular terms, this humor is called *kidding around* or *putting someone on*. It is part of the daily life of many Americans and often serves as a background to regular conversations. A pun uses words or phrases to exploit ambiguities and innuendoes in their meaning, usually for humorous effect, as a play of words. An example is:

*Ben Battle was a soldier bold
Moreover, it is used for war alarms.
But a cannonball took off his legs,
So he laid down his arms (Thomas Hood)*

A quip is a sarcastic or cutting remark or just a witty saying. For example:

– Are you fishing? No, just downing worms [3, p. 31].

Parody is also a significant genre of English humor. The master parodist, the librettist W. S. Gilbert, parodied not only English society in his comic operas, satirizing the class system but culture as well, poking fun at conventional drama and the aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century. At the same time, his composer Arthur Sullivan wrote music essentially one extended parody of Rossini, Wagner, English folk music, Japanese music, and so on. There is a saying in England: *You cannot do anything in England without someone making fun of it*.

Burlesque became a popular form of entertainment in the USA in the middle of the 19th century. Initially a form of farce in which females in male roles mocked the politics and culture of the day, burlesque was condemned by opinion makers for its sexuality and outspokenness. The form was hounded off the "legitimate stage" and relegated to saloons and barrooms, and its content primarily raunchy jokes.

One more common characteristic of English and American humor is irony, widely used in English and American literature and radio comedy shows. *Irony* is a literary or rhetorical device in which there is a gap or incongruity between what a speaker or a writer says and what is generally understood (either at the time or in the later context of history). Irony may also arise from discordance between acts and results, especially if it is striking and known to a later audience. A certain kind of pursuing a desired outcome results in the opposite effect, but again, only if this is known to a third party. In this case, the aesthetic arises from the realization that an outcome and that the very effort has seen its undoing. More generally, irony is understood at an aesthetic valuation by an audience, which relies on a sharp discordance between the real and the ideal and is variously applied to texts, speech, events, acts, and even fashion. All the different senses of irony revolve around the perceived notion of an incongruity, or a gap, between an understanding of reality, or expectation of reality, and what happens.

H. W. Fowler, a scientist, used to say about irony: "An irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and the outsider's incomprehension." [5, p. 293].

There are different kinds of irony:

1. Socratic irony is feigning ignorance in order to expose the weakness of another's position. Socratic irony involves a profession of ignorance that disguises a skeptical, non-committed attitude towards some dogma or universal opinion that lacks a basis for reason or logic. Socrates' "innocent" inquiries expose the vanity or illogicality of the proposition step by step by unsettling the assumptions of his dialogue partner by questioning or simply not sharing his basic assumptions. The irony entertains those onlookers who know that Socrates is wiser than he permits himself to appear and who may perceive slightly in advance the direction the "naïve" questioning will take. Many have interpreted Socrates as not feigning ignorance so much as expressing philosophical skepticism.

2. Roman irony is the kind of irony that was used in public speaking

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and rhetoric in Roman times. Its very characteristic was that the words were used opposite to their meaning or intent. Shakespeare imitated Roman irony in his play "Julius Caesar" in Mark Antony's speech: *Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears! I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him*", continually emphasizing that Brutus and the conspirators "are honorable men." The subsequent monologue uses extensive irony to glorify Caesar; Antony selects words that seem to support the assassins, while his purpose and effect incite the crowd against them.

3. *Verbal irony* is traditionally defined as using words to convey something other than, and especially the opposite of, the literal meaning of the words. One classic example is a speaker saying, *"What lovely weather we are having!"* as she looks out at a rainstorm, intending to express her dissatisfaction with the weather. However, there are examples of verbal irony that do not rely on saying the opposite of what one means, and there are cases where all the traditional criteria of irony exist and the utterance is not ironic.

Verbal irony is distinguished from related phenomena such as situational and dramatic irony in that speakers produce it intentionally. For instance, if a speaker exclaims, *"I am not upset!"* but reveals an upset, emotional state through her voice while genuinely trying to claim he is not upset, it would not be verbal irony just by its verbal manifestation (it would, however, be situational irony). However, the utterance would be a verbal irony if the speaker said the exact words and intended to communicate that she was upset by claiming she was not.

This distinction gets at an important aspect of verbal irony: speakers communicate implied propositions that are intentionally contradictory to the propositions in the words themselves. A fair amount of confusion has surrounded the issue regarding the relationship between verbal irony and sarcasm, and psychology researchers have addressed the issue directly. For example, ridicule is an essential aspect of sarcasm, not verbal irony. By this account, sarcasm is a particular kind of personal criticism leveled against a person or group of persons that incorporates verbal irony.

For example, a person reports to her friend that rather than going to a medical doctor to treat her ovarian cancer, she has decided to the spiritual

healer instead. In response, her friend says sarcastically, "*Great idea! I hear they do fine work!*".

Research shows that most instances of verbal irony are considered to be sarcastic, suggesting that the term "sarcasm" is more widely used than its technical definition suggests it should be. Some psycholinguistic theorists suggest that sarcasm ("*Great idea! I hear they do fine work!*"), hyperbole ("*That is the best idea I have heard in years!*"), understatement ("*Sure, what the hell, it is only cancer...*"), rhetorical questions ("*What, does your spirit have cancer?*"), double entendre ("*I will be if you do that, you will be communing with spirits in no time...*") and jocularity ("*bet them to six your lad back while you are at it!*") should be considered types of verbal irony. The differences between these tropes can be pretty subtle and relate to the listeners' typical emotional reactions and the speakers' rhetorical goals [4, p. 544].

In this vein of thought, different types of irony are regarded.

1. *Situational irony* occurs when a situation's results are far different from what was expected. This results in surprise and unfairness due to the odd situation. For example, a situation immortalized in O'Henry's story "The Gift of the Magi" is one in which a young couple is too poor to buy each other Christmas gifts. The man finally pawns his heirloom pocket watch to buy his wife a set of combs for her long, prized, beautiful hair. Meanwhile, she cuts her hair to sell a watch chain to a Wigmaker for money to my husband. The irony is two-fold: the couple, having parted with their tangible valuables, is caused by the act of discovering the richness of the intangible.

The expression "*irony of fate*" stems from the notion that the gods (or the Fates) amuse themselves by toying with the minds of mortals with deliberate ironic intent. It is closely connected with cosmic irony; it arises from sharp contrasts between reality and human ideas or between human intentions and actual results.

For example:

- *The artist Monet's loss of vision, but not hearing.*
- *Ludwig van Beethoven's loss of hearing but no vision.*

The term "*historical irony*" (cosmic irony through time) is singled out

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from the point of view that when history is seen through modern eyes, it sometimes happens that there is an incredibly sharp contrast between the way historical figures see their world and the probably future of their world, and what transpired. When the World War began in the 20th century and was named "The War to End All Wars," this became an example of historical irony.

Tragic irony (dramatic irony) becomes a device for heightening the intensification of dramatic situations. It may take several forms: the character speaking may realize the irony of his words while the rest of the characters may not, or he or she may be unconscious. At the same time, the other actors share the knowledge with the spectators, or the spectators may alone realize the irony. A famous case of tragic irony occurs in the William Shakespeare play "Romeo and Juliet" when Romeo finds Juliet in a drugged death-like sleep, and he assumes her to be dead and kills himself. Upon awakening to find her dead lover beside her, Juliet kills herself with his knife.

Layers of *comic irony* pervade Jane Austen's novels. The first sentence of "Pride and Prejudice" famously opens with a nearly mathematical postulate: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." The scene that follows immediately betrays the proposal. "No, a rich young man moving into the neighborhood did not come to seek a wife." It soon becomes clear that Austen means the opposite: women (or their mothers) are always in search of, and desperately on the lookout for, a rich single man to make a husband. The irony deepens as the story promotes his romance and ends in a double wedding [4, p. 545].

Any irony requires a cultural backdrop to be understood or noticed, and as with any culture – specific idioms, irony often cannot be ideally transplanted. An expression with a secondary meaning clear to a last-coast American may be obscure to a Canadian, Briton, Australian, or even west-coast American, though they ostensibly all speak the same language. Attempting a literal translation of an ironic idiom to another language often renders the concept muddled or incoherent. Further, verbal irony may also rely on non-literal cues such as tone of voice and

posture. Every culture incorporates its form of linguistic metaphor, idiom, and subtlety. In such cases, translation requires extra care and explanation.

As stated earlier, despite several common characteristics, English and American humor are separated by some peculiar features. Thus, for the English, it is love for nonsensical, whimsical, and black humor. For Americans, it is physical comedy, which has many forms (banana peel on the floor, pie-in-the-face).

The whimsical is an interesting sideline in English humor, frequently verging on the downright precious. The English are the nation that produces cute little stories about the adventures of talking animals (the best examples of which, for whimsy, melancholy, and gentleness, are A.A. Milne's Pooh books: but one can also look at Beatrix Potter, Enid Blyton, and the Womble books).

The English like humor that charms them. Their appreciation of the whimsicalness probably arises from a need to feel cozy and secure and their love affair with childhood. They read children's novels for a reason, and most never entirely lose their instinct for play. The whimsical reminds people of all that is good about childhood and is entirely non-threatening. This sort of humor could be found in older editions of "Punch," especially concerning animals, children, and sweet old ladies from the countryside visiting London for the first time.

Because the English try to find humor in nearly all circumstances, they gained the reputation of black humor in the rest of the world, which is probably not entirely deserved. Humour among the English tends to manifest itself mainly in times of personal hardship and is largely self-directed.

The refusal to take the prospect of one's death seriously has certainly been a relatively common English characteristic, rather baffling to other nations, and it has paid off in war situations. (George Mikes thought, "*The English are the only people in the world who enjoy dying.*") The wholesale use of black humor for no good reason is a very recent phenomenon and is typified by the more savage Monty Python sketches. However, by and large, humorists have not imitated this, and there is reason to believe that

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the use of black humor mainly as a coping mechanism is still its most common manifestation. In stressful circumstances, one can say to his friend, "*At the end of exams, I will be a highly – qualified corpse*") [6, p. 34].

Of all the characteristics that separate English and American humor, the most important is slang, which is peculiar only to Americans. Slang is meant to introduce new metaphors or new forms of language of a metaphorical character, strained almost to the breaking point. Sometimes, it can be done with a single word. A "hat" is only "a lid" placed on top of a human being. Similarly, a woman becomes a "skirt" and so on. These words disappear or retain a permanent place, being slang no longer. No doubt, half of the words, if not all of them, were once slang. Even within one's memory, one can see the whole process carried through: "Cinch" once sounded funny; it is now standard American English.

However, other slang is made up of descriptive phrases. At best, these slang phrases are hilarious. However, they are funniest when newly coined, and it takes a master hand to coin them well. For a supreme example of wild vagaries of language used for humor, one might take O'Henry's "Gentle Grafters." However, here, imitation is as easy as tiresome. The invention of pointless slang phrases without real suggestion or merit is one of the most familiar forms of factory-made humor.

Now, the English people are apt to turn away from the whole field of slang. In the first place, it puzzles them – they do not know whether each particular word or phrase is a sort of idiom already known to Americans or something (as with O. Henry) never said before and to be analyzed for its own sake.

Conclusions and suggestions. Thus, understanding the essence of humor as a kind of comic is consistent with the ideas of most linguists and is fully applicable to verbal humor. The text's linguistic and stylistic means, techniques, and mechanisms are closely intertwined, creating a stable and effective comic effect. We propose a further study of the primary linguistic means of creating the comic effect in the stories of contemporary English-language prose writers whose poetics combines humor, irony, satire, sarcasm, and black humor.

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