

Cultural Differences between American and Uzbek Jokes and the Genre Characteristics of Humor

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Abstract: The article examines the cultural characteristics of American and Uzbek anecdotes, focusing on their similarities and differences as genres. It analyzes the social and aesthetic nature of laughter, along with the role and significance of humor within cultural contexts. The contrast between the direct irony of American jokes and the subtle nuances of Uzbek anecdotes highlights national mentalities and cultural values. This study aims to explore how cultural characteristics influence the reflection of social dynamics through humor.

Keywords: oral prose stories, humor, satire, cultural significance, folklore, humor genres, cultural traditions, artistic aesthetics, humor, laughter, societal impact, cultural context, comic effects, comedy, types of laughter.



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INTRODUCTION.

Anecdotes are a type of small-scale oral prose story that remain popular among people and thrive in live performances. They stand out from other folklore genres due to their focus on creating comic situations, featuring main characters whose actions provoke laughter and include humorous dialogue.

Throughout human history, laughter has played a vital role in uplifting people's spirits and fostering a shared cultural atmosphere. Consequently, the field of world folkloristics has shown growing interest in studying folklore genres associated with laughter, examining their distinctive features, genre-specific nature, and artistic appeal.

Researching humorous folklore genres helps trace the gradual evolution of artistic and aesthetic perspectives, as well as the poetic thinking of our ancestors. After all, the national identity and spiritual essence of any nation are deeply rooted in its way of thinking.

In the context of intensifying globalization, a typological study of the jokes of the American and Uzbek peoples holds significant importance for fostering the spiritual maturity of the youth in New Uzbekistan. Furthermore, by comparing the cultures of these two nations, it becomes possible to draw more precise conclusions about their artistic, aesthetic, and cultural values.

LITERATURE REVIEW.

Western scholars regard humor and laughter as significant social phenomena. I. Goffman, known for his research on the social aspects of laughter, identifies "frames" as a crucial tool for creating humorous situations[1]. Similarly, Russian scholar S.S. Melnikov, who studied cartoons from the 20th and 21st centuries, developed a classification system for frames based on their specific characteristics [2]. Another Russian researcher, N.A. Orlova, argues that "laughter is the most complex and philosophical of all forms of humor. The moral essence of laughter aligns closely with the system of folk values expressed in folklore"[3]. Orlova emphasizes the connection between laughter and national identity, suggesting that laughter itself is a value intrinsic to the cultural fabric of a people.

Uzbek folklorist G. Kholbutaev offers insightful reflections on Orlova's views in his studies on the Askiya genre. He notes, "The comic type of artistic thinking serves as an heir to primitive mythological consciousness and reflects the worldview and artistic-aesthetic perspectives of our ancestors connected to laughter. Laughter is not merely close to a value system—it is a value. Even in ancient times, humanity sought ways to cultivate moments of joy and alleviate worries. Violations of established rules and norms often provoked laughter"[4].

Linguist G. Bateson introduces the concept of the "frame," derived from the English term meaning "structure" or "context." In jokes, the frame represents a figurative field shaped by gestures and actions in speech, creating a unique spiritual dynamic [5]. In Uzbek anecdotes, there is a longstanding tradition of crafting comic situations that provoke laughter while subtly critiquing societal issues through lighthearted humor [6].

Folklorist V. Ya. Propp considers laughter an integral element of folklore. He categorizes laughter into several distinct types based on its character:

1. **Dobryy smex** – sincere, pleasant laughter;
2. **Zloy smex** – sarcastic, malicious laughter;
3. **Smex sinichnyy** – shameless, irreverent laughter;
4. **Jizneradostnyy smex** – cheerful, joyful laughter;
5. **Ritual laughter** – ceremonial or ritualistic laughter;
6. **Roaring laughter** – loud, unrestrained laughter[7].

Propp's classification of laughter appears to be universal, extending beyond Russian culture to encompass all peoples of the world. For example, similar expressions of laughter can be observed in the anecdotes of both Uzbek and American cultures.

G. Kholbutayev, who studied Uzbek jokes in relation to the challenges facing the Askiya genre, established criteria for humor. According to him, 'Humor can be classified based on specific criteria:

by execution;

by subject matter;

by mood creation;

by jokes with a national or regional character;

by jokes based on human natural flaws' [8].

The characteristics identified by G. Kholbutayev can also be observed in the humor and jokes of the American people. Regardless of nationality, jokes serve as a means of eliciting laughter, whether to critique or uplift spirits.

Folklorist O.Qayumov, who explored laughter in the folklore of Uzbek magical ceremonies, notes that its origins are rooted in ancient magical concepts[9]. According to the scholar, laughter possesses a magical essence, and a person who laughs deeply may enter a state of ecstasy. Similar theoretical perspectives can be found in V.Ya.Propp's analysis of the magic of laughter and in folklorist K.Imomov's studies on laughter in anecdotes.

Renowned folklorist O.Safarov, a leading researcher of Bukhara folklore, observes: 'Uzbek folk anecdotes are notable for their extraordinary openings and unique storytelling. They are characterized by light and sharp humor, brevity in length, and conciseness in content, often consisting of one to three episodes. Typically performed solo, these anecdotes use folk humor, wit, and light satire to reflect life's realities through fiction, wordplay, and quips. Satire and humor play a key role in resolving the plot, with the climax often hinging on a clever pun or joke.

The dialogue form of speech is a prominent feature of anecdotes, which often reflect socio-political and everyday themes. By humorously exposing negative traits such as simplicity, naivety, misunderstanding, illiteracy, modesty, and carelessness, anecdotes encourage people to remain vigilant and self-aware[10]. As O.Safarov aptly noted, anecdotes are not characterized by excessive imagery. Instead, they exhibit simplicity in composition, conciseness in plot, and an extraordinary resolution often stemming from unexpected humor. Additionally, their reliance on a single central character and accidental laughter are consistent and defining features of the genre[10].

In the history of philosophy, laughter has long been studied as a social phenomenon. A.F. Losev, who explored the history of ancient culture, examined its role in the works of ancient philosophers. The scholar M.F.Quintilian identified several aspects of laughter: explanation (*urbanitas*), occasional wit (*venustum*), distinctiveness or originality (*salsum*), humor (*facetum*), wit (*jocus*), and sincerity (*decacitas*)[11]. According to Quintilian, these aspects may represent the semantic essence of laughter rather than its direct causes.

The renowned psychologist Alexander Luke, in his treatise on humor and intelligence, categorized humor-related feelings into various groups, including opposition to norms, false reinforcement, absurdity (e.g., through hyperbole or euphemism), nonsense, a mixture of styles or plans (e.g., mixed speech styles), allusions or specific references, double interpretation, humor itself, reverse comparison, random or secondary comparisons of unrelated items or events, repetition (exact repetition, repetition with altered grammatical structures, and repetition with altered meanings), and paradox[12].

Both perspectives illustrate the complexity and depth of laughter as both a psychological and philosophical phenomenon.

US scientists have conducted extensive research on humor. For example, Purdue University professor Victor Raskin explored the linguistic sources of humor in his work on *The Semantic Theory of Humor*. Raskin describes the verbal form of humor as follows:

"Any humor arises from the interplay of real and unrealistic situations. Typically, such situations include:

1. Real and fake events,
2. Expected versus unexpected or unimaginable occurrences,
3. Events that are close to reality—possible but seemingly unbelievable".

According to Raskin, humor often involves binary categories related to a person's worldview and perception of the world, such as woman/man, lie/truth, life/death, goodness/evil, wisdom/foolishness, and merit/impropriety[13]. He characterizes humor as a situation defined by its semantic essence.

In general, humor is neither purely a situation nor an emotion. Rather, humor represents a qualitative category of attitude. It is expressed through speech or action, where the categorical understanding of this attitude manifests as a joke. Laughter, then, should be viewed as its consequence rather than its essence.

According to the Austrian psychologist Z. Freud, "A joke is invented; an incident happens in laughter"[14]. Folklorist G. Kholbotayev distinguishes between humor and laughter based on their nature and timing. He explains, "Humor is expressed through actions and words, while laughter is the joyous reaction that results from it"[15].

N.M. Chuyakova, who studied the jokes of the Adyg people, notes, "Comics with sharp words have distinct characteristics. They must adhere to specific topics, such as politics, household issues, or class problems, with humor and laughter playing a leading role"[16]. Chuyakova classifies folklore works that rely on humor as being rooted in a comic foundation.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.

Humor serves as a universal tool that transcends cultural boundaries, highlighting the nuanced cultural and educational aspects of various societies. It reflects human values, beliefs, and social dynamics, offering fascinating insights into the cultures that produce it. By examining the themes, structures, and nature of jokes within different contexts, we can better understand the cultural innovations that shape comedic expression.

American and Uzbek humor, while distinct, provide rich grounds for comparison. By focusing on the similarities and differences between these two cultural contexts, we can deepen our understanding of how humor evolves and connects societies.

American humor is distinct from that of other nations due to its directness, sharp sarcasm, and satirical edge. From the biting political satire of late-night television to the keen observational comedy of stand-up performances, American humor often targets authority figures, social norms, and stereotypes. A hallmark of this humor is the use of short, snappy text designed to provoke immediate laughter. Comedians such as George Carlin, Jerry Seinfeld, and Dave Chappelle exemplify this approach, blending witty social commentary with humor that invites both laughter and introspection.

As a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures, America's humor is richly diverse, offering a wide range of styles and colorful expressions. American jokes often reflect a national mindset that embraces sharp, unconventional humor alongside sincere, delicately crafted wit. Americans typically maintain a broad perspective on humor, where the act of laughing and having fun is seen as a right, even if the humor occasionally ventures into rudeness or personal territory.

In contrast, Uzbek humor is characterized by its subtlety and sensitivity. Uzbek jokes and satire often employ nuanced quirks, symbols, or imagery to convey humor, avoiding direct mockery of a person's physical traits or personal shortcomings. This approach reflects the cultural value placed on tact and respect in social interactions, showcasing humor as a refined art form that upholds dignity while entertaining.

According to A.V.Makarov, American teenagers are helping to create a "democracy of humor" with their playful antics[17]. However, within American social networks, anecdotes about ethnic, religious, intimate relationships, subversiveness, cruelty, and even war are becoming increasingly popular. This reflects the broad cultural scope of American humor.

While intimate anecdotes can also be found in Uzbek humor, the cultural context is different. In Uzbek folklore, topics such as intimate matters, religion, war, and tragic human experiences are not the subject of laughter[4].

Uzbek humor, rooted in Central Asia, is shaped by the nation's rich cultural heritage. Uzbek anecdotes are characterized by their gentle and refined nature, often relying on situational comedy and engaging storytelling. The humor in these anecdotes lies not only in the punchlines but also in the art of weaving jokes into compelling narratives. In Uzbek culture, telling a joke is considered as important as making people laugh, highlighting the storytelling tradition of Uzbek humorists.

Moreover, significant changes have occurred in the way humor is used in Uzbekistan's cultural landscape. The creative reinterpretation of folk anecdotes has gained momentum, with TV shows, videos, and stage performances bringing these traditional jokes to life in new formats. This trend showcases how Uzbek humor continues to evolve while retaining its roots in folk culture[15].

This study explores the themes, structures, and cultural nuances underlying expressions of laughter. By examining the nature of humor in both American and Uzbek contexts, we gain a deeper understanding of the cultural factors that influence how laughter is elicited. American jokes often delve into topics such as politics, ethnicity, and social issues, while Uzbek humor tends to focus on everyday life situations, social relations, and traditional customs.

By comparing the similarities and differences between American and Uzbek humor, we can uncover the diverse ways in which humor manifests across cultures.

American humor is often marked by its directness, irony, and use of puns. Irony and self-deprecation are prevalent, with jokes frequently targeting authority figures, social norms, and stereotypes. This style of humor reflects the cultural values and attitudes that are central to American society.

Themes in American Jokes American humor covers a broad range of topics, reflecting the country's diversity. Common themes include politics, ethnicity, gender, and social issues. Political jokes often satirize politicians, government policies, and current events, providing commentary on the political landscape. Ethnic humor, while sometimes controversial, serves as a tool for challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusivity through laughter. Gendered humor explores the complexities of relationships and societal expectations. Additionally, wordplay, such as puns, is a popular feature in American humor, often focusing on linguistic manipulation to create humor[13].

The Nature of Uzbek Jokes Located in Central Asia, Uzbekistan boasts its own unique brand of humor, rooted in its cultural traditions and historical context. Uzbek jokes often incorporate puns, anecdotes, and elements of folk tales. Known for their subtle and gentle nature, these jokes typically rely on situational comedy and storytelling. In Uzbek culture, humor is intricately woven into narratives, with the art of storytelling playing a significant role. Many jokes are embedded within stories or dialogues, highlighting the value placed on the creative expression of humor.

CONCLUSION.

To conclude, this study highlights the profound cultural significance of humor within both American and Uzbek societies, illustrating how cultural context shapes the nature, execution, and purpose of jokes. While American humor is often direct, satirical, and sharp in its critique of societal norms and authority, Uzbek humor demonstrates a more nuanced and tactful approach, focused on situational comedy and the art of storytelling. Despite these differences, both cultures utilize humor as a means to reflect on social dynamics, offering insights into national identities, values, and worldviews. This comparison underscores the power of humor as a universal yet culturally specific tool for social commentary and entertainment, showcasing how humor evolves while remaining deeply rooted in tradition. As the global landscape continues to change, the study of humor in various cultural contexts offers an invaluable opportunity to foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciate the diverse ways in which laughter shapes human experience.

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