

Explicit vs. Implicit Strategies: Pragmatic Mechanisms of Humor in French and Uzbek Comic Dialogues

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how comic effect emerges through verbal strategies in French and Uzbek dialogues, focusing on the pragmatic mechanisms that generate humor in conversational interaction. Drawing on Grice's cooperative principle and speech act theory, the analysis reveals a systematic contrast between two communicative models: French comic dialogues rely on explicit confrontation, direct accusation, and overt violation of conversational maxims, whereas Uzbek comic texts employ implicit evaluation, metaphorical imagery, and conversational implicature. The empirical material comprises dialogic exchanges from French and Uzbek literary sources, analyzed through a three-stage pragmatic model. Findings demonstrate that comic effect arises not from lexical features but from the pragmatic gap between what is said and what is understood. The locus of humor differs cross-linguistically: in French dialogues, laughter activates at the moment of explicit norm violation, while in Uzbek texts it emerges during the addressee's interpretive reconstruction of implicit meaning. This comparative study contributes to pragmatic linguistics by demonstrating that humor operates as a universal communicative phenomenon with culturally specific realization mechanisms.

Keywords: Pragmatic mechanisms, conversational implicature, comic dialogue, explicit vs. implicit humor, cross-linguistic pragmatics, speech act theory, addressee interpretation

INTRODUCTION

Humor in conversational interaction has traditionally been analyzed through lexical and stylistic features, but this approach does not explain why the same utterance produces laughter in one context and fails in another. Recent developments in pragmatics suggest that comic effect is not a property of linguistic form but emerges from the relationship between speaker intention and addressee interpretation within specific communicative situations.

This study examines how comic meaning is constructed in spoken dialogues through pragmatic mechanisms. We compare French and Uzbek conversational dialogues to determine whether humor operates through universal pragmatic principles or through language-specific communicative strategies. The empirical material consists of dialogues from French and Uzbek sources, analyzed using H.P. Grice's cooperative principle [1] and speech act theory [2].

Our central claim is that comic effect results from deliberate violations of conversational maxims. When speakers breach expectations related to relevance, quantity, or manner, addressees must reconstruct implicit meaning through inferential processes. This gap between literal utterance and recovered meaning constitutes the pragmatic basis of humor [3]. However, the point at which this gap activates laughter may vary across languages and communicative cultures.

Preliminary analysis indicates a systematic difference between French and Uzbek dialogues. In French conversational dialogues, humor frequently involves explicit accusation, direct confrontation, and overt breaches of politeness norms. The violation itself triggers the comic response. In Uzbek dialogues, humor more often relies on implicit evaluation, metaphorical reference, and conversational implicature. Here the comic effect emerges not at the moment of utterance but during the addressee's interpretive reconstruction of hidden meaning.

To test this hypothesis, we apply a three-stage analytical procedure. First, we identify the normative communicative expectation established by context and participant roles. Second,

we determine which conversational maxim is violated and how. Third, we trace whether comic effect arises during the violation itself or during subsequent interpretation. This procedure allows systematic comparison across different pragmatic environments [4].

The analysis is grounded in Grice's model of conversational implicature, which treats communication as a cooperative activity governed by shared expectations [1]. When these expectations are deliberately subverted, addressees engage in inferential reasoning to recover the speaker's intended meaning. We argue that this inferential process is the locus of comic effect. Supporting frameworks include speech act theory for identifying illocutionary force and politeness theory for analyzing face-threatening acts in confrontational exchanges.

Our findings demonstrate that while both French and Uzbek dialogues generate humor through pragmatic incongruity, they differ in the temporal and cognitive location of that incongruity. French dialogues foreground the violation itself, making laughter an immediate response to norm disruption. Uzbek dialogues foreground the interpretive act, making laughter a delayed response to meaning reconstruction. This distinction reflects broader differences in how directness and indirectness function as communicative strategies.

This study contributes to cross-linguistic pragmatics by showing that humor is a universal communicative phenomenon with culturally variable realization patterns. The same underlying mechanism—violation of conversational expectations—produces different surface manifestations depending on whether a speech community privileges explicit or implicit communicative norms. Understanding these differences requires analyzing not just what speakers say, but how addressees process what is said within specific pragmatic frameworks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is based on dialogues from Georges Courteline's "La Paix chez soi" [5] and Abdulla Qahhor's "Ayajonlarim" [6]. Both works focus on domestic conflict and use conversational

exchanges to generate humor. We selected two dialogue sequences—one from each language – that contain multiple speaker turns and produce identifiable comic effect. Each dialogue was transcribed with attention to turn structure, speaker roles, and contextual information.

The analysis applies Herbert Paul Grice's cooperative principle, which proposes that communication operates through four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner [1]. When speakers violate these maxims, addressees infer implicit meaning beyond literal content. We treat comic effect as emerging from this inferential process. J. L. Austin's speech act theory supports the analysis by distinguishing locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions of utterances [7]. Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle is applied selectively to French dialogues where face-threatening acts are explicit [8]. For Uzbek dialogues, where humor relies on metaphor and indirect evaluation, we use Ch. S. Peirce's semiotic model to trace how figurative expressions function as pragmatic signals [9].

Each dialogue was analyzed through three stages. First, we identified the normative communicative expectation based on context and participant roles. Second, we determined which maxim was violated and how. Third, we traced whether comic effect arises during the violation itself or during subsequent interpretation. This procedure allows systematic comparison across pragmatic environments.

We coded each dialogue for type of maxim violated, directness of violation, presence of face-threatening acts, use of metaphor or hyperbole, and point at which comic effect emerges. Patterns were identified inductively rather than imposed through predetermined categories. This approach revealed systematic differences between French and Uzbek dialogues in how humor is constructed pragmatically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines how comic meaning is constructed in French and Uzbek dialogues through pragmatic mechanisms. The analysis applies H. P. Grice's cooperative principle to determine

whether comic effect arises from the violation itself or from the addressee's interpretive process [1].

French comic dialogue: Explicit violation

The following exchange from “La Paix chez soi” illustrates how comic effect emerges through direct confrontation:

TRIELLE: Si.
 VALENTINE: Non. Est-ce que tu deviens imbécile? De huit cents francs ôtez six cent cinquante?
 TRIELLE: Reste cent cinquante francs.
 VALENTINE: Eh bien?
 TRIELLE: Eh bien quoi?
 VALENTINE: Donne-les moi.
 TRIELLE: Ah, non.
 VALENTINE: Pourquoi donc?
 TRIELLE: Parce que tu me les dois.
 VALENTINE: Qu'est-ce que tu me chantes? Tu ne m'as pas prêté d'argent...
 TRIELLE: Les cent cinquante francs d'amende que j'ai eu le regret de t'infliger...[4]

In this dialogue, Trielle introduces administrative language (fine, penalty, calculation) into a domestic argument. This violates Grice's maxim of manner by using a register inappropriate to the context [1]. The comic effect is immediate. Valentine recognizes the incongruity and responds with direct challenge. The humor arises from the explicit mismatch between bureaucratic discourse and household interaction.

Trielle's insistence on treating domestic life as an institution creates mechanical rigidity. The violation is foregrounded, and laughter occurs at the moment of utterance. There is no delayed interpretation. The addressee does not need to reconstruct hidden meaning because the absurdity is explicit.

Uzbek comic dialogue: Implicit evaluation

The following exchange from “Ayajonlarim” shows a different pattern:

Bo'ston: Hamma ayb sizda! Mening o'g'lim-ku indamas, siz Xayriga aytib xat yozdiringiz bo'lmasmidi!

To'tiniso: Voy, Xayri nega xat yozar ekan, Karimjon yozishi kerak, bulbulning ham erkagi sayraydi!

Bo'ston: Karimjon sayraydigan bulbul emas, shuning uchun o'zim sayrab yuribman-da!

To'tiniso (o'zicha): Bir hisobda Karimjon sayramaydigan bulbul chiqqani ham yaxshi, sayraydigan chiqib o'sha yoqlardan biron-tasini yetaklab kelsa nima bo'lar edi!

...

To'tiniso(Bo'stonga): Mehmon bironing uyida samovar ko'tarib yuradimi, bulbulingiz sayragangao'xshaydi [5].

To'tiniso uses the nightingale metaphor to criticize Karimjon's passivity. The literal meaning (male nightingales sing) is irrelevant to the situation. The implicit meaning is that Karimjon fails to fulfill expected social roles. This violates the maxim of relation, but the violation is indirect.

The comic effect does not arise immediately. The addressee must decode the metaphor using cultural knowledge. Bo'ston understands the criticism but does not confront it directly. Instead, she accepts the metaphor and deflects responsibility. Later, To'tiniso's remark about the guest carrying a samovar implies that the guest is not really a guest. The surface question conceals an evaluation. Comic effect emerges when the addressee reconstructs this hidden meaning.

The aside (*o'zicha*) adds another layer. To'tiniso's internal commentary is not addressed to Bo'ston but to the audience. This creates distance between utterance and interpretation. Laughter arises not from what is said but from what is understood [10].

The analysis reveals a systematic difference in how comic effect is activated. French dialogues generate humor through explicit violation. Administrative language in domestic contexts, direct accusations, and open confrontation create immediate incongruity. The violation itself triggers laughter.

Uzbek dialogues generate humor through implicit evaluation. Metaphor, hyperbole, and implicature require interpretive reconstruction. The addressee must infer hidden meaning from

context and cultural knowledge. Laughter arises during this cognitive process, not at the moment of utterance.

Both patterns operate through the same underlying mechanism: violation of conversational expectations. However, they differ in temporal and cognitive location. French comic discourse foregrounds the violation. Uzbek comic discourse foregrounds the interpretation.

This distinction reflects broader communicative norms. French dialogues privilege directness and explicit confrontation as sources of humor. Uzbek dialogues privilege indirectness and implicit evaluation. Both create comic effect through pragmatic incongruity, but they activate that incongruity at different stages of the communicative process.

The findings demonstrate that humor is a universal pragmatic phenomenon with culturally variable realization patterns. The same mechanism—violation of conversational maxims—produces different surface manifestations depending on whether a speech community privileges explicit or implicit communicative strategies.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study investigated the pragmatic construction of comic effect in French and Uzbek conversational dialogues. Applying H. P. Grice's cooperative principle and a three-stage analytical model [1], the research identified systematic differences in how humor is activated across the two linguistic communities.

The central finding is that humor operates through a universal mechanism—violation of conversational maxims – but diverges in its temporal and cognitive realization [11]. French dialogues activate comic effect at the point of violation through explicit confrontation, administrative register mismatches, and direct face-threatening acts. Uzbek dialogues activate comic effect during addressee interpretation through metaphorical encoding, implicit evaluation, and conversational implicature. This distinction reflects broader communicative preferences:

French discourse privileges transparency and directness, while Uzbek discourse privileges indirectness and figurative mediation.

The study demonstrates that comic meaning does not reside in lexical choice or stylistic ornamentation but emerges from the pragmatic gap between utterance and interpretation [12]. Laughter is triggered not by what speakers say but by how addressees reconstruct intended meaning within culturally specific frameworks. This insight challenges traditional approaches that treat humor as a textual property rather than a communicative process.

Methodologically, the research confirms that pragmatic analysis provides a systematic framework for cross-linguistic comparison. By isolating the stages of expectation formation, norm violation, and interpretive reconstruction, we can identify both universal principles and culture-specific strategies. The three-stage model applied here proved effective in distinguishing immediate from delayed comic activation and can be extended to other language pairs.

The findings carry implications for translation practice, intercultural communication training, and second language pedagogy. Translators must recognize that humor cannot be transferred through lexical equivalence alone; successful translation requires reconstructing the pragmatic mechanism in the target language. Language learners need explicit instruction not only in linguistic forms but in the communicative norms that govern when and how humor functions appropriately in interaction.

Future research should address three limitations of the present study. First, the corpus should be expanded to include spontaneous spoken data alongside literary dialogues. Second, experimental methods could test whether native speakers exhibit measurable differences in processing speed when encountering explicit versus implicit humor. Third, additional language pairs should be examined to determine whether the explicit-implicit distinction represents a stable typological parameter or reflects specific cultural histories.

Despite these limitations, the study establishes that pragmatic mechanisms provide a principled basis for comparing how

different languages construct humor. Comic effect is neither arbitrary nor purely cultural but follows identifiable patterns rooted in the relationship between speaker intention and addressee interpretation. Understanding these patterns requires moving beyond surface features to analyze the communicative processes through which meaning is negotiated and laughter is produced.

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