

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HUMOROUS DIALOGUES IN DIFFERENT
LANGUAGES BASED ON SPEECH ACT THEORY**

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Introduction

The essence of humor lies not only in the words with funny content but often in the specific pragmatic use of speech, i.e., in how it is said. Speech Act Theory, developed by J.L. Austin and J.R. Searle, emphasizes that speech is not only about conveying a certain meaning but also a means of performing a certain action. The speaker promises, asks, orders, curses, or casts a spell. In humorous speech, the standard use of these speech acts is violated, turned in an unexpected direction, or interpreted in a specific way, and it is this violation that serves as the main source of the comic effect.

The aim of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis, based on Speech Act Theory, of how humorous dialogues (jokes, anecdotes) are constructed in various languages—specifically Uzbek, Russian, and English—and how their illocutionary force (the purpose and force of the speech act) is used for comedy.

Any speech act consists of three components:

1. Locutionary act: The act of uttering a sentence with a certain logical meaning.
2. Illocutionary act: The act performed by uttering the sentence with a certain intention and force (e.g., requesting, promising, warning).
3. Perlocutionary act: The act of achieving an effect on the listener or reader (e.g., offending, amusing, surprising).

Humor often occurs at the level of the illocutionary act. The speaker utters a phrase that implies a certain illocutionary force (e.g., warning), but their words are interpreted as having another, unexpected illocutionary force (e.g., joking). Or the listener expects one illocutionary force from the utterance, but the speaker presents a completely different one.

Below, we examine how the main speech acts—promising, asking, and ordering—are used in humorous contexts in different languages.

Comic Effect Generated Through the "Promise" Act. The act of "promising" implies a commitment to perform a certain action in the future. In a humorous context, this commitment is deliberately violated or exaggerated to an absurd degree.

Example in Uzbek:

- My friend, I will always support you, I will use all my strength for your success!
- Really? I really trust your word.
- Of course! If you succeed, I will gain self-confidence.

Here, the first utterance carries a high illocutionary force of "promising." The listener expects a sincere promise of help. But the "promise" in the second response is entirely egocentric and useless. The speaker makes his commitment to "gain self-confidence" conditional on his friend's success, thereby nullifying the original promise of help. The illocutionary force shifts from the expected direction, creating a comic effect.

Example in Russian (Classic anecdote):

- Vasya, if I become a millionaire, I'll give you ten thousand dollars!
- If I become a millionaire, I'll also give you ten thousand dollars!
- Well, what if I don't become a millionaire?

– If you don't become a millionaire, I won't give you anything either!

Here, the "promise" act is entirely conditional and self-negating. The first person promises on the condition of becoming a millionaire; the second not only makes his promise conditional on the first person's status but also negates the scenario of not becoming a millionaire. The answer to the question "What if I don't?" reveals the complete insignificance and emptiness of the "promise" act, creating a comical situation.

Example in English ("Sarcastic promise"):

Co-worker A: "I promise I'll finish the report by tomorrow, no matter what!"

Co-worker B: "Yeah, and I promise I'll become the CEO by Friday."

Here, B expresses disbelief in the colleague's promise. His "promise" act is not actually a promise but an act of "taunting." He uses his own currently unfulfillable promise to emphasize that A's promise is equally illusory and untrustworthy. This shift in illocutionary force—from a sincere promise to sarcastic criticism—creates the humor.

Comic Effect Generated Through the "Asking" Act. The "asking" act demands the performance of an action or the provision of information. In humor, this demand is excessive, unnatural, or used in the wrong context.

Example in Uzbek:

Aunt: Well, dear, tell me, what profession should one choose in today's world?

Nephew: Auntie, first tell me, which profession won't lose its relevance even 20 years from now?

Aunt: (thinking) ...I don't know.

Nephew: Auntie, just be a pensioner.

The aunt's question requires serious advice. The nephew's response is also in the form of a question, but its illocutionary force is not to ask for advice but to express his own pessimistic viewpoint and make a joke. He throws the question back but with a meaningless and unexpected content, leaving a comical impression.

Example in Russian:

– Dad, I'm asking you, what does it take to be successful in life?

– Son, the main thing is to be in the right place at the right time.

– But when and where is the right [place and time]?

– That's what I'm asking myself!

The father, in response to his son's serious question, gives advice that seems serious but provides no practical information. His answer to the follow-up question completely negates the "asking" act because he admits the inadequacy of his own advice. The illocutionary force shifts from "giving advice" to "admitting one's own helplessness."

Example in English (Wrong answer to a "Rhetorical question"):

Person A: "Can you even imagine how hard that must have been?"

Person B: "Yes. I've imagined it. It was very hard. Next question."

Here, A's question is a rhetorical question; its illocutionary force is to "affirm" or "express empathy." B takes it literally, as a real question, and answers it, then adds "next question." This breaks the "asking/answering" dialogic model. B's response nullifies the purpose of the rhetorical question and becomes an unexpected, and therefore funny, answer.

Comic Effect Generated Through the "Ordering" Act. The "ordering" act demands that the listener perform a certain action. In humor, this demand is usually made by a weaker person to a stronger one, or the demand itself is absurd.

Example in Uzbek:

Manager: We need to continue working in the evening. We must support each other as a team!

Employee: Thank you, manager. I am supporting you. I permit you to work in the evening.

The manager's speech contains a soft form of "ordering" – "need to," "must." The employee deliberately misinterprets this illocutionary force, placing himself on an equal level with the manager, and "grants him permission." This symbolic resistance and downplaying of the significance of the "order" act create a comic effect.

Example in Russian:

Wife to husband: Misha, sweep the yard!

Husband: Okay, I'll sweep.

(10 minutes later)

Wife: Misha, what are you doing?

Husband: I'm walking around the yard, waiting for the wind to pick up!

The husband literally obeys his wife's direct order but chooses the most inefficient and foolish way to execute it. He fulfills only the literal meaning (the act of sweeping), not the illocutionary purpose of the act (cleaning the yard). This violation of the illocutionary purpose is the basis of the humor.

Example in English ("Passive-aggressive command"):

Wife: "The garbage is looking a bit lonely out there. It probably misses its friends at the dump."

Husband: "I'll tell it you said hello."

The wife's utterance is a hidden form of the "ordering" act. She doesn't say "take out the trash" directly but uses a poetic metaphor to express her wish. The illocutionary force shifts from "ordering" to "requesting." The husband's response completely ignores this hidden illocutionary force. He takes the metaphor literally and responds as if being witty, while actually avoiding carrying out the command. This verbal sparring and mismatch of illocutionary forces create a comical situation.

Conclusion

Analyzing humorous dialogues in different languages through the lens of Speech Act Theory shows that the emergence of the comic effect has a universal mechanism: the violation of the expected outcome of the illocutionary force. Regardless of language systems and cultural differences, humor is primarily formed at the illocutionary (purposive) level of speech.

In the "promising" act, humor arises from the unconditional, meaningless, or impossible nature of the promise, as well as its sarcastic reinterpretation.

In the "asking" act, humor is generated by the question being in the wrong context, to an excessive degree, or by giving a literal answer to a rhetorical question.

In the "ordering" act, humor is created by the symbolic response of the weak to the strong, the literal but insane execution of the order, or the deliberate misunderstanding of a hidden command.

In Uzbek and Russian, humor is more anecdotal, based on events and logical structure; the violation of illocutionary force is clear and more explicit. In English humor, especially British and American, it relies more on sarcasm, indirect speech, and linguistic play; the violation of illocutionary force is subtler and often achieved through literal interpretation.

Therefore, understanding humor requires understanding not only the lexical meaning of words but also the purpose of the speech act being performed through them and how that purpose is being violated. Humor is not just a play on words, but a play on speech acts.

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