PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING IRONY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERARY DISCOURSE: A LINGUOPRAGMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract. Irony is one of the most complex phenomena in literary discourse because its intended meaning frequently differs from its literal linguistic expression. This discrepancy becomes particularly problematic in literary translation, where ironic meaning depends not only on lexical and grammatical structures but also on context, speaker intention, cultural knowledge, evaluative attitudes, and pragmatic inference. The present article examines the major problems involved in translating irony between English and Uzbek literary discourse. The article proposes an authorial linguopragmatic model consisting of five analytical parameters: literal expression, contextual contradiction, implied meaning, communicative intention, and translation effect.

Keywords: irony, literary translation, English, Uzbek, linguopragmatics, pragmatic equivalence, implicit meaning, cultural context, translation transformation, communicative intention.

Introduction. Irony occupies a special position among expressive linguistic phenomena because the meaning intended by the speaker cannot always be derived directly from the words used. A speaker may express a positive evaluation while actually communicating criticism, dissatisfaction or even strong disapproval. Therefore, the interpretation of irony requires the interaction of linguistic form, context, background knowledge and communicative intention. From a pragmatic perspective, irony has traditionally been associated with the discrepancy between what is literally said and what is intended. Grice's theory of conversational implicature provides one important explanation of this discrepancy: when an apparently inappropriate or contradictory statement occurs in a particular context, the hearer searches for an additional implied interpretation. [1:] This perspective is particularly relevant to literary translation because the translator has to reproduce not only the proposition but also the attitude embedded in the ironic utterance.

The English-Uzbek translation of irony is especially interesting because the two languages employ different linguistic, cultural and discourse resources for creating ironic effects. Recent comparative research likewise points to differences in the realization of irony and emphasizes the role of pragmatic equivalence, cultural context and contextual inference in translation.

The purpose of this article is therefore not simply to identify English and Uzbek equivalents of ironic expressions, but to determine what happens to ironic meaning when it moves from one linguistic and cultural system into another. These approaches suggest that ironic meaning can be represented as a multidimensional structure:

Literal expression → contextual discrepancy → implied meaning → speaker's attitude → communicative effect

This sequence is particularly important for translation. A translator who transfers only the first component may reproduce the words while losing the irony. This definition deliberately avoids equating irony with sarcasm. Sarcasm can be regarded as one particularly sharp and often hostile realization of ironic communication, but not every ironic utterance is sarcastic.

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Why irony is difficult to translate. The central translation problem can be expressed through the following contradiction:

same words ≠ same pragmatic meaning

An English ironic utterance may have a formally accurate Uzbek equivalent, but the target reader may fail to interpret it ironically. For example, imagine the following dialogue: "What a wonderful idea!" The literal meaning is positive. However, if the speaker has just described an obviously disastrous proposal, the utterance may communicate: "That is a terrible idea." If the Uzbek translation simply reproduces the positive evaluation without preserving the contextual contradiction, the ironic interpretation may disappear. Thus, the translator must reproduce not only the semantic content, but also the interpretive conditions that activate irony.

The problem of implicit meaning. One of the most significant difficulties is the loss of implicit meaning. Irony frequently depends on information that is not explicitly verbalized. The reader must infer it from the situation.

Consider: "Excellent work!" If the speaker says this after someone has broken an expensive object, the expression is ironic. The translator therefore has two possible strategies.

Strategy A: formal preservation. "Ajoyib ish!" This maintains the surface meaning but may weaken the ironic interpretation.

Strategy B: pragmatic adaptation. "Juda yaxshi ish qilibsiz!"Depending on context and intonation, the Uzbek form may reproduce the evaluative and ironic effect more naturally. The important point is that the translation unit is not necessarily the isolated sentence. The relevant unit may be the entire interactional context. This corresponds to a broader translation principle proposed by Baker, according to which equivalence should be considered at different textual and pragmatic levels rather than exclusively at the level of individual words. [6:]

Cultural problems in translating irony. Culture constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to ironic translation.

An ironic expression may contain:

1. historical references;
2. social stereotypes;
3. traditional values;
4. culturally specific humour;
5. idioms;
6. proverbs;
7. allusions;
8. forms of politeness;
9. culture-specific institutions.

Such elements may be transparent to the source-language reader but unfamiliar to the target audience. Recent English-Uzbek research identifies cultural mismatch, pragmatic meaning loss and interpretive ambiguity as major problems in transferring irony between the two languages. In our view, cultural incompatibility should not be understood simply as the absence of an equivalent word. The deeper problem is the absence of a shared interpretive frame.

Therefore: cultural translation of irony = linguistic transfer + reconstruction of the interpretive frame. This distinction is important because a translator may successfully translate every lexical item while still failing to transfer the irony.

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Wordplay and irony. Wordplay presents a particularly serious problem because its effect frequently depends on phonetic or semantic relations available only in the source language. A pun may simultaneously perform two functions:

lexical ambiguity + ironic evaluation.

When such a pun is translated literally, the second function may disappear. Recent English-Uzbek translation research specifically identifies wordplay and culturally dependent humour as difficult areas because linguistic mechanisms available in English may not have direct structural equivalents in Uzbek. [2:]

Therefore, a translator may need to use:

1. substitution;
2. modulation;
3. compensation;
4. explicitation;
5. restructuring;
6. creative adaptation.

The goal is not to reproduce the same words but to recreate the same interpretive effect.

The problem of pragmatic weakening. A particularly important phenomenon is pragmatic weakening.

It occurs when: strong ironic evaluation → weaker target-language evaluation

For example: “Brilliant!” may express strong criticism in the source context.

If the translation uses a neutral equivalent such as: “Yaxshi.”

the semantic core remains positive, but the ironic intensity is reduced.

This can be represented as: $IR_s > IR_t$ where:

1. IR_s = ironic force of the source text;
2. IR_t = ironic force of the target text.

When $IR_t < IR_s$, pragmatic weakening occurs.

This transformation may be stylistically justified in some contexts, but it can alter characterization and interpersonal relations. This can be useful, but excessive explicitation may destroy one of the central characteristics of irony: interpretive ambiguity.

For example: “Wonderful.”

The original leaves the reader to decide whether the speaker is sincere or ironic.

If the translation adds: “Ha, juda ‘ajoyib’, albatta.”

the ironic interpretation becomes explicit. The reader no longer performs the same inferential work. In our view, not every ambiguity should be eliminated in translation. When ambiguity is an intentional component of literary irony, preserving it may be more faithful than explaining it.

Irony, characterization and translation. In literary discourse, irony does not merely communicate an isolated meaning. It also contributes to characterization.

An ironic character may appear:

1. intelligent;
2. witty;
3. critical;
4. emotionally distant;
5. socially resistant;

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6. humorous;
7. aggressive;
8. sophisticated.

Therefore, if irony is weakened in translation, the character itself may change.

For example: **English:** subtle ironic understatement

may become: **Uzbek:** direct criticism. The propositional message may remain similar, but the character becomes less subtle.

Thus, translation of irony is simultaneously a problem of meaning transfer and character construction.

Authorial linguopragmatic model of ironic translation. On the basis of the preceding discussion, we propose the following model:

Source form → Context → Incongruity → Implied evaluation → Communicative intention → Target realization → Target effect

This model differs from a purely semantic translation model because it includes the interpretive stages between linguistic form and target-language realization.

The model can be operationalized through five parameters:

Table 1

Parameter	**Question**
LF – Literal Form	What is explicitly said?
CI – Contextual Incongruity	What contradicts the literal interpretation?
IM – Implied Meaning	What does the speaker actually communicate?
CI – Communicative Intention	Why is the irony used?
TE – Target Effect	Does the translation produce a comparable effect?

Accordingly: Ironic Translation Equivalence = LF + CI + IM + Communicative Intention + Target Effect

This is proposed here as an authorial analytical model, rather than as a reproduction of an existing classification.

Comparative English–Uzbek perspective. The available comparative literature already indicates that irony in English and Uzbek shares general pragmatic characteristics but also demonstrates language- and culture-specific realization patterns. Recent work describes English irony as often more dependent on lexical, prosodic or explicit contextual cues, while Uzbek irony may rely more heavily on indirectness, cultural knowledge and contextual interpretation. At the same time, these tendencies should not be treated as absolute rules. Literary style, genre, author, character and historical period can substantially modify the pattern.

Therefore, rather than claiming: “English always uses X, while Uzbek always uses Y,” the more scientifically appropriate formulation is: “The analyzed corpus demonstrates a greater tendency toward X, whereas the Uzbek corpus demonstrates a greater tendency toward Y.”This distinction is particularly important for empirical research. **Suggested corpus-based analysis.**

For a fuller empirical study, the corpus may consist of:

1. English literary originals;
2. their Uzbek translations;

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3. selected dialogues containing verbal irony;
4. metaphorical irony;
5. hyperbolic irony;
6. understatement;
7. phraseological irony;
8. wordplay;
9. culture-bound irony.

Each example can be coded according to:

Table 2

№	English original	Uzbek translation	Type of irony	Translation strategy	Pragmatic change
1	Original	Translation	verbal	preservation	none
2	Original	Translation	metaphorical	substitution	weakening
3	Original	Translation	hyperbolic	restructuring	preservation
4	Original	Translation	idiomatic	adaptation	strengthening
5	Original	Translation	wordplay	compensation	restructuring

The statistical analysis should then show how frequently each transformation occurs. This would make the article more than a descriptive discussion: it would provide measurable evidence of translation tendencies. The article also distinguishes pragmatic preservation, weakening, strengthening, restructuring, explicitation, implicitation and pragmatic loss as analytical categories. The translation of irony from English into Uzbek is not a matter of replacing one figurative expression with another. Irony is constructed through the interaction of linguistic form, context, cultural knowledge, speaker attitude and reader inference.

The major difficulties arise when the source and target languages do not provide equivalent mechanisms for activating the same ironic interpretation. Particularly problematic are culturally marked expressions, metaphor, understatement, hyperbole, idioms, wordplay and context-dependent evaluative statements. The analysis demonstrates that four central problems deserve particular attention: loss of implicit meaning, cultural mismatch, change in ironic force, and alteration of communicative effect. From the proposed linguopragmatic perspective, an adequate translation should therefore satisfy the following principle:

The translator should reproduce not merely what the ironic utterance says, but what it makes the target reader understand and how it makes the reader interpret the speaker's attitude. Consequently, pragmatic equivalence should be regarded as a central criterion in evaluating English-Uzbek translations of literary irony. At the same time, the preservation of ambiguity should not automatically be sacrificed for the sake of explicitness, since ambiguity itself may constitute an essential part of the author's ironic strategy.

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