







Role of Humorous Discourse in Developing Intercultural Interaction: A Linguacultural Analysis

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Abstract

One of the most significant questions in linguistics is the relationship between language and culture and the nature of their interaction. Humor is one such method that can either facilitate or hinder effective intercultural communication. Humorous discourse as a linguistic phenomenon in applied linguistics ascertains communicative competence and builds a framework of linguo-culturology and intercultural communication. The objective of this study was to elucidate the role of humorous discourse within the linguacultural framework and present respondents' perceptions of humorous discourse from a different cultural context. Employing a mixed method research design, the study employed linguo-cognitive, discursive, sociolinguistic, and experimental techniques. The participants comprised 106 international students and 113 local students, who shared their perception about humorous utterances in the Kazakh cultural context. A questionnaire explored respondents' perception about three sampled humorous utterances, that were a part of the Kazakh culture and communication, analyzing their meaning within context. A majority of respondents from international students group agreed that humor can be a bridge for mutual understanding, showing a positive sign for intercultural interaction. The overall findings suggest that humor has the potential to create bridges for mutual understanding between cultures, although its effectiveness largely depends on context and proper usage. The study also found out that use of humor is limited due to language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of confidence in the use of humor as an inter-cultural communication tool. The study emphasizes the need for further research in the field of intercultural communication and humor as a means of overcoming cultural barriers.

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Introduction

In the current era of chaos and intercultural conflicts and clashes, humanity is coming to understand that the ways of life of people from different cultures should not be judged through the lens of any one country's values. A substantial portion of research in applied linguistics focuses on defining this construct and identifying ways to help language learners achieve it. Studies have attempted to understand how interlocutors—particularly those from different cultural backgrounds—achieve (or fail to achieve) engagement in conversation, which is a central element of communicative competence. The accelerating pace of communication between people from various cultures and civilizations, who often use different methods to solve the same problems, has become a part of everyday life (Marian, 2024). Humor is one such method that can either facilitate or hinder effective intercultural communication (Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). Humor is also theoretically significant as a component of a key construct in applied linguistics: communicative competence (Petkova, 2021). Humor is also an essential component of national culture that reflects the nuances of linguistic consciousness, worldview, and national mentality. The interconnection between language, culture, and society is particularly pronounced in comedic forms, as humor not only exemplifies cultural values, but also functions as a mechanism for socialization and intercultural interaction (Hamilton & Foltzer, 2021; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021).

Humorous discourse is a highly relevant topic in the context of globalization and from a linguacultural perspective. In contemporary linguistics, the study and comprehension of humorous discourse as a linguistic phenomenon is becoming increasingly important within the framework of linguo-culturology. Humorous discourse is a significant subject owing to its applicability to fields such as linguistics, linguo-culturology, intercultural communication, and foreign language teaching. Although there is sustained interest in the study of humor across various types of discourse, as revealed in several studies (Attardo, 2020; Long & Graesser, 1988; Magnotta & Strohl, 2011; Schwarz, 2009), the analysis of humorous discourse as an object of linguo-culturological inquiry and its role in intercultural contexts remains insufficiently explored, despite its potential as an effective tool for breaking down barriers and enhancing communication. The objective of our study was to elucidate the role of humorous discourse within the linguacultural framework and present respondents' perceptions of humorous discourse from a different cultural context.

The influence of humor is evident in raising awareness of intercultural differences, bridging their gaps, and bringing together different cultures, leading to intercultural communication. Humor remains an important communication tool, emphasizing the need for further research in the field of intercultural communication and as a means of overcoming cultural barriers. This research is grounded in the works of scholars such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Alexander Potebnja, Pitirim Sorokin, E.M. Vereshchagin and V.G. Kostomarov, all of whom were influential figures in the field of socio-linguistics, particularly in the context of teaching Russian as a foreign language. These experts had focused on the relationship between language and culture, emphasizing the importance of understanding cultural nuances for effective communication and language learning. Specifically, some of these even explored humorous discourse in the linguacultural context, and postulated theoretical and practical implications for the study of humorous discourse within linguo-cultures. The study is based on the premise that humor has the potential to create bridges for mutual understanding between cultures, although its effectiveness largely depends on context and proper usage (Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). It proposes a practical model for interpreting humorous utterances within culturally variable contexts. The findings contribute to a more profound understanding of the role of humor in language and culture and aid in developing effective strategies for intercultural interaction. The target audience includes educators and researchers in the fields of humorous discourse and linguo-culture. In this way, the research makes a meaningful contribution to both the theoretical and applied aspects of linguo-culturology and the study of humorous discourse.

Literature Review

Relationship Between Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture has long been a central concern for scholars and linguists who pioneered the notion of linguacultural aspect in the domain of sociolinguistics. Scholars, beginning with Plato, have claimed that language creates culture, suggesting that ideas are innate. Others such as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1985), Sapir (2023), Whorf (2012), and their followers (Cohen, 2005; Kramsch, 2014; Kulinich, 2021; Leontovich, 2012; Zelvis, 2021) have believed that language is a passive product of culture. A special mention can be made of Kramsch (2014); Kharitonov (1991) Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (1987) among others. Edward Sapir argued “language is closely tied to culture; it is rooted in it, expresses it, and is a prerequisite for the development of culture as a whole” (Sapir, 2023). Some modern linguists argue that interlingual activity is inherently cross-cultural and that humor is one of the means by which culture is conveyed. Research on the linguacultural aspect (Humboldt, 1985; Kramsch, 2014; Serdega, 2017; Uffelmann, 2020) primarily focuses on developing an understanding of how language and culture function and interact within a mutually recognized, global, or universal environment. For instance, linguacultural interconnection requires awareness of the

assumptions made by one person, as well as awareness of the assumptions and expectations of others. Speech acts are words or phrases that accompany social situations and facilitate communication (Ladilova & Schröder, 2022; Nardon, Steers, & Sanchez-Runde, 2011). Culturally universal speech acts—such as greetings or expressions of gratitude—are, for the most part, easily translated and understood, as they exist in most cultures and languages. However, in many cases, communicative situations are unique or culture-dependent, making them difficult to interpret or convey. These actions do not always overlap, as the target language or culture may lack a corresponding situation (Humboldt, 1985; Kramsch, 2014). Thus, a person's native culture is a framework of familiar language that, in practice, manifests as public opinion, stereotypes, and everyday notions. It is important to note that each unique act of intercultural communication generates a new sphere of activity—a new field of self-expression—previously unfamiliar to the participants in cross-cultural interaction. Language and linguistic practices occupy a central place in the context of linguacultural aspects; language determines not only the nature of communicative connections and the possibility of mutual understanding, but also the content of a person's inner world, worldview, and processes of identity formation (Kramsch, 2014).

Humor and Humorous Discourse

A noted linguist Stephen Leacock defines humor as a good-natured attitude toward life's inconsistencies and its expression through art, or a sense that allows us to convey this attitude (Lynch, 1988). Likewise, Karasik (2002) considers humor to be the ability to perceive the comic aspects of life, describing it as a fundamental human trait. According to Kulinich (2021), humor is a special way of interpreting certain fragments of reality and serves as a unique indicator of human maturity. Attardo (2001) explores the linguistic aspects of humor and identifies both universal and culture-specific features of the comic across cultures. Martin & Ford (2018) categorize humor into three broad forms—jokes, spontaneous conversational humor, and accidental or unintentional humor. While Jokes are seen as short and entertaining stories and exploited by people to create funny environment; spontaneous conversational humor comprises humor types such as irony, satire, sarcasm, pun, and responses to rhetoric questions and unintentional humor included such unconscious funny utterances or actions made by people without thinking. Nilsen & Nilsen (2000) called unintentional humor as 'accidental humor' or accidental linguistic humor that is caused by minor actions committed by chance. A larger role played by humor is that of reducing social distance, and to bring together people belonging to different cultures. Humor can be used to reflect cultural values and promote intra-group cohesion (Bakhtin, 1976; Belyaev & Belyaeva, 2022; Dziemidok, 1974; Lynch, 2002). Lynch (2002) indicates that "all humor is fundamentally a communicative activity.... intended or unintended message interpreted as funny". Linguists such as Dziemidok (1974), and Belyaev & Belyaeva (2022) considered humor as a socially significant aesthetic category with its national character and cultural characteristics. In cultural studies, humor is used as a realistic caricature of cultural similarities and differences (Nardon et al., 2011). Other researchers of humor in linguistics (Karasik, 2002; Kulinich, 2021) point out that humor arises from a choice or combination of factors that allow society to look unexpected and different at familiar things in a new comic way.

Humorous discourse caters to laughter or fun, which is an expression of the combination of action or thought about a subject that can humor (Salayeva, Eshchanova, & Atadjanova, 2024). Often humorous discourse depends on the perception of a subject or their attitude. Zhou et al. (2022) consider humorous discourse a laughing discourse. Humorous discourse refers to a text intended to make a person laugh. Authors such as (Isakova & Kultanbaeva, 2025; Issakova et al., 2023; Mohebbi, 2023; Tyukina, Melnikova, & Babayan, 2021) investigate ethnic stereotypes in humorous discourse based on jokes in Kazakh, Russian, Arabic, English, and French. Researchers (Lu et al., 2019) examine creativity and humor from a cultural perspective, paying particular attention to the role of culture-specific social factors and how they affect the perception and use of humor (Cao et al., 2023). In Kazakh sociolinguistics, Karasik (2002) pioneered humorous discourse in the linguacultural context, and postulated theoretical and practical implications for the study of humorous discourse within linguo-cultures. The ethnocultural features of Kazakh humor—including proverbs, sayings, idiomatic expressions, and riddles—combine the centuries-long wisdom of the Kazakh people with the nation's cultural identity. Karasik (2002) defined humorous discourse "as a text immersed in a situation of laughing communication", which has following features: 1) the participants communicative intention to avoid a serious conversation, 2) the humorous tone of communication, i.e. the desire to reduce the distance and critically rethink modern concepts in a soft form, 3) the presence of certain behaviors in a joking dialogue, accepted in this language culture. Great Kazakh linguists like E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov, hailed as founders of the linguistic and cultural approach, have emphasized another conceptual component: participation in exchanges between different national cultures and "the immense spiritual wealth embedded in the language being studied." (Kostomarov, 1987).

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed method research design, combining both qualitative (cognitive-linguistic, discourse, and sociolinguistic) and quantitative (experimental) approaches. In the qualitative phase, data was collected in the form of respondents' perception about humorous utterances in the Kazakh cultural context.

The quantitative research design involved collecting data on the number of respondents who responded positively (found the jokes funny) and negatively (found them not funny). Both methods made it possible to understand the linguistic and linguacultural aspects of humor.

Sampling

The sample of the study comprised 106 foreign students from the M. Ospanov West Kazakhstan Medical University, and 113 local students from various universities across Kazakhstan. Both categories of students were English speaking and responded to the same questionnaire. All the participants were residing in Kazakhstan at the time of the experiment, and voluntarily participated in the study.

Instrument and Data Collection

A survey was conducted to determine the role of humor in the intercultural context. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions. Additionally, it collected demographic information about country, nationality, age, gender, and university. A majority of questions focused on the respondent's views on humor. Humorous statements from the well-known Kazakh linguacultural context were presented in three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English), and respondents were asked whether, in their opinion, these statements were funny. Their reactions to the humor were measured (e.g., "funny/not funny" on a scale). The experiment was conducted online with Google Forms.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved a content analysis of the cognitive-linguistic aspects of humorous utterances followed by discourse analysis, sociolinguistic analysis, and psycholinguistic experiment analysis. The content analysis of the qualitative data utilized a cognitive-linguistic approach to investigate how individuals from different cultures perceive and interpret humor based on their linguistic and cognitive experiences. It allowed for the identification of cultural differences in humor. In the quantitative phase, the discourse analysis examined to what extent the sampled humorous utterances were a part of the Kazakh culture and communication, analyzing their meaning within context. The sociolinguistic analysis examined what were the national and social factors (age, education, cultural traditions) that influenced students' perception of humor. The experimental method (psycholinguistic experiment), finally, tested respondents' humor perception. In the end, a comparative analysis was also conducted which examined how respondents from different linguistic groups perceive the same humorous utterances. This allowed us to determine differences in humor perception based on national worldview and cultural traditions.

Results

The demographic information was collected to understand the factors like country, nationality, age, gender, and university influenced the perception of students for humorous utterances. Among the international students who participated in the survey, the age groups of 15-20 years and 21-30 years comprised the same number (52, 49.1%). However, a majority of local students who participated in the survey belonged to 15–20 years old (91,80.5%), followed by 21–30 years old (21,18.6%). Among the international students, 75 (70.8%) students were male and 31 (29.2%) were female. The local students comprised 65 (57.5%) male and 48 (42.5%) female. [Table 1](#) presents the demographic details of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Details of Participants in the Survey.

Description	Category	International students (n=106)	Local students (n=113)
Age	15–20 years	52 (49.1%)	-
	21–30 years	(52) 49.1%	91(80.5%)
	31–40 years	(01)0.9%	21(18.6%)
	41–50 years	(01) 0.9%	(01) 0.9%
Gender	Male	75 (70.8%)	65 (57.5%)
	Female	31 (29.2%)	48 (42.5%)

The first question in the survey enquired how often international students used humor in their interactions with local students, and vice versa. The response of the international students comprised 34.9% rarely, 31.1% sometimes, 17% never, 10.4% often, and 6.6% very often. The response of the local students was as follows: 7.1% rarely, 19.5% sometimes, 36.3% never, 22.1% often, and 15% very often. These findings suggest that humorous discourse does not play a significant role in interactions between social groups and interaction between international and local students in a medical university. [Table 2](#) presents these findings.

These findings reflect upon the perception of the respondents and their thought patterns; the way of life, and spirituality of each nation. Certain historical, natural, and social factors also serve as the foundation for their perception. For instance, a majority of international respondents indicated that they use humor rarely (34.9%) or sometimes (31.1%) or never (17%). Together, these groups make up more than 80%, which suggests a low

frequency of humor use in intercultural interactions with local students. Likewise, the frequency of use of humor in discourse amount to only 17% (10.4% often and 6.6%, very often), which indicates that for some respondents, humor may be an important communication tool, but such cases are relatively few. The possible reasons for the less frequency of the use of humor by international students could be language barrier: difficulties in conveying humor due to language differences; or cultural differences: concerns that jokes may be misunderstood or perceived as offensive; or lack of confidence: uncertainty that humor will be adequately appreciated.

Table 2: Role of Humorous Discourse in Interactions Between Social Groups.

Q.1 Does humorous discourse play a significant role in interactions between social groups of students?			
Response	International students		Local students
Rarely	34.9%		7.1%
Sometimes	31.1%		19.5%
Never	17%		36.3%
Often	10.4%		22.1%
Very Often	6.6%		15%

The second question in the survey asked a direct question about the cultural context to both groups, whether humor can be a bridge for understanding between cultures. It was found that 50% of the international students agreed to this statement, followed by 46.2% remaining neutral; and 3.8% disagreed. The responses of local students showed that 57.5% of them agreed; 40.7% remained neutral; and 1.8% disagreed. Table 3 summarizes these findings.

Table 3: Humor as a Bridge for Understanding Between Cultures.

Q.2 Culturally, can humor be a bridge for understanding between cultures?			
Response	International students		Local students
Agree	50%		57.5%
Neutral	46.4%		40.7%
Disagree	3.8%		1.8%

The third question in the survey referred to the following three humorous utterances which were shared with both groups of students:

The First Humorous Utterance

Cold tea. One day Kozhanasir came to the tea house and asked, "Is there any cold tea?". The keeper of café looks and says "no". On the second day, Kozhanasir came again and said, "is there any cold tea? The keeper of café says," no", of course, we have all the time hot tea." On the third day, the keeper of café thinks about the Kozhanasir, and specially prepare cold tea for him. Kozhanasir came and said, "is there any cold tea? "there is, the keeper of café says," I have prepared it especially for you." Then Kozhanasir said, "Make it hot and bring it there, let's drink tea."

The Second Humorous Utterance

Dead kazan (cauldron -national Kazakh dish). Kozhanasyr inviting guests and asked a neighbor for a large kazan. The next day, a neighbor who came to take away his kazan sees a small kazan, similar to his own. Kozhanasyr jokingly says: "Contractions started at your cauldron at night." The neighbor, without hesitation, takes them both away, saying: "Oh, good, it is good." The next time he calls a guest again, Kozhanasir asks for his neighbor's kazan again. This time, Kozhanasyr said to a neighbor who came to take away his kazan: "there is no, Kazan died at night." The neighbor angrily says: "was kazan mortal, give me my kazan." Then Kozhanasyr said: "whoever believes in the birth of another kazan must believe in death."

The Third Humorous Utterance

Kozhanasyr goes to visit the house of an acquaintance. The owner of the house brings stuck bread and a plate of honey. After Kozhanasyr does not pass his teeth on the hard bread, he takes honey with a spoon and begins to eat it. Seeing it, the house owner: - Oh, be careful! It is said that if honey is eaten without bread, it will burn a person's stomach. After Kozhanasyr finished eating honey, said: God, knows whose stomach is burning. The participants were asked whether these utterances from the Kazakh linguacultural context appeared to them funny or not. For the first humorous utterance, 61.3% of international students answered positively, meaning it was funny from the Kazakh linguacultural context, while 38.7% answered negatively, meaning it was not funny. The local (Kazakhstani) students also held similar opinion and 66.4% of local students answered positively, meaning it was funny, while 33.6% answered negatively, meaning it was not funny, from the Kazakh linguacultural context. For the second humorous utterance, 46.2% of international students answered positively, meaning it was funny, from the Kazakh linguacultural context, while 53.8% answered negatively, meaning it was not funny. The local students' opinion was divided: 55.8% answered positively, meaning it was funny, while 44.2% answered negatively, from the Kazakh linguacultural context. For the

third humorous utterance, 58.5% of international students answered positively, meaning it was funny, while 41.5% answered negatively, meaning it was not funny, from the Kazakh linguacultural context. The local students' opinion was divided: 56.4% answered positively, meaning it was funny, while 43.6% answered negatively, from the Kazakh linguacultural context. Table 4 summarizes these findings

Table 4: Students' Perception of Humor in the Utterances, from the Kazakh Linguacultural Context.

Response	International students		Local students	
	Funny	Not Funny	Funny	Not Funny
Humorous utterance 1	61.3%	38.7%	66.4%	33.6%
Humorous utterance 2	46.2%	53.8%	55.8%	44.2%
Humorous utterance 3	58.5%	41.5%	56.4%	43.6%

The third question in the survey asked "What, in your opinion, can help people better understand the humor of another culture?". The objective of this question was to explore the role of humorous discourse in the linguacultural aspect. The international students' responses showed Learning the language (47.2%); Immersion in the culture through films/books (15.1%); Living in the country (24.5%) and Others (10.4%) can help people better understand the humor of another culture. The responses of the local students varied a little: Learning the language (57.5%); Immersion in the culture through films/books (26.5%); Living in the country (10.6%); Other (5.3%). Table 5 presents these findings.

Table 5: Factors That Can Help People Better Understand the Humor of Another Culture.

Q.4 What, in your opinion, can help people better understand the humor of another culture?			
Response	International students		Local students
Learning the language	47.2%		57.5%
Immersion in the culture through films/books	15.1%		26.5%
Living in the country	24.5%		10.6%
Others	10.4%		5.3%

The responses received from the survey helped us gain deep insights into the understanding of humor in the relationships between representatives of different cultures. The above-tabulated results reveal the perception of respondents related to humor as a bridge for understanding between cultures, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Humor As a Bridge for Understanding Between Cultures.

Respondents	Positive	Neutral	Disagree
International students	50%	46.2%	3.8%
Local students	57.5%	40.7%	1.8%

It is evident that a majority of respondents from international students group (50%) agree that humor can be a bridge for mutual understanding. This indicates significant support for this idea, which can be interpreted as a positive sign for intercultural interaction. However, a considerable portion of respondents from international students (46.2%) and local students (40.7%) remained neutral. This may indicate a little uncertainty about the issue, associated with a lack of personal experience, and lack of awareness of the challenges that arise when translating and interpreting humor in an intercultural context. Such a high proportion of neutral responses indicates the need for further study of the factors influencing the perception of humor in different cultures and raising awareness of intercultural differences. Lastly, a small percentage of respondents from foreign students (3.8%) and local students (1.8%) completely disagreed with the statement. This could be related to negative experiences with using humor in intercultural situations or a belief that cultural differences are too vast for humor to be effectively used. Considering that a very small percentage of respondents expressed complete disagreement, it can be concluded that humor has the potential to create bridges for mutual understanding, although its effectiveness may depend on the context and proper use.

Conclusion

Since each linguistic community segments reality in its own way, and because there are many different languages—each with its own grammar, vocabulary, and semantics—the worldviews embedded in each language are also unique. The same universal human experience is encoded in particular national languages which, as we have noted, divide and reflect the real world differently. This uniqueness is primarily evident in the lexical system (lexicon) of a national language. Because culture is created by humans for human use, it functions through communication. The communication process can only be successful if mutual understanding exists between interlocutors—an understanding that is based on a broad context defined by culture. Thus, mastering a language different from one's native tongue opens new dimensions of perceiving reality and "creates additional layers of reality." Overcoming language barriers, however, cannot always be achieved solely through mastering and deeply knowing a language; mutual understanding between people

from different cultural value systems also plays a crucial role.

The results of the study suggest that humor has the potential to create bridges for mutual understanding between cultures, although its effectiveness largely depends on context and proper usage. The high proportion of neutral responses indicates the need for further investigation into the factors that influence the perception of humor across cultures, as well as the importance of raising awareness of intercultural differences. When people first interact with other cultures, they quickly realize that they respond differently to specific events and that they have a personal system of values and ethics that differs significantly from their own culture. Intercultural communication though can bring together different cultures, leading to a clash of cultural and personal worldviews. For understanding humor, cultural context and identified barriers, along with strategies for overcoming them, are important. The analysis of data on the frequency of humor use in interactions with local students shows that humor is used relatively rarely, especially among international students. The main reasons for the rare use of humor are the language barrier, cultural differences, and a lack of confidence that humor will be properly understood. At the same time, for a small group of respondents, humor remains an important communication tool, emphasizing the need for further research in the field of intercultural communication and humor as a means of overcoming cultural barriers.

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