

Linguocultural features of English anecdotes

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Abstract: This article examines the linguocultural features of English anecdotes as an important form of humorous discourse reflecting the national worldview, cultural values, and communicative behavior of English-speaking society. The study analyzes the linguistic and cultural specificity of anecdotes, including their lexical, stylistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural characteristics. Particular attention is paid to the role of humor, irony, precedent phenomena, stereotypes, and cultural codes in the formation of anecdotal discourse. The research also explores the relationship between language and culture in the process of creating comic effect and transmitting cultural meanings. The results of the study demonstrate that English anecdotes serve not only as a means of entertainment but also as a reflection of national mentality and cultural identity.

Keywords: linguoculturology, anecdote, humorous discourse, cultural code, irony, national mentality, linguistic worldview, stereotypes, pragmatics, English culture

Introduction. Humor has always occupied a special place in human communication, reflecting not only emotional reactions but also the cultural, social, and linguistic characteristics of a particular society. Among various forms of humorous discourse, anecdotes represent one of the most widespread and culturally significant genres. English anecdotes, in particular, reveal important features of English national mentality, communicative traditions, social stereotypes, and cultural values.

Modern linguistics increasingly focuses on the interaction between language and culture, which has led to the active development of linguoculturology as an interdisciplinary field. Within this framework, anecdotes are viewed not merely as entertaining texts but as carriers of culturally marked meanings and national-specific worldviews. English humorous discourse is characterized by irony, understatement, indirectness, wordplay, and pragmatic ambiguity, which often reflect the communicative norms of English-speaking society.

The relevance of this research lies in the growing interest in cross-cultural communication and the necessity of understanding the cultural specificity of language units and discourse practices (Nosirova, 2021). The study of English anecdotes from a linguocultural perspective contributes to identifying the mechanisms of verbalizing cultural values and stereotypes through humor.

The object of the study is English anecdotal discourse, while the subject is the linguocultural features represented in English anecdotes. The aim of the research is to analyze the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of English anecdotes and determine their role in reflecting national culture and mentality.

The methodological basis of the research includes descriptive, contextual, linguocultural, and discourse analysis methods.

The research draws upon the linguistic and cultural theory of humor developed by scholars such as Victor Raskin (1985), who introduced the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor (SSTH)¹, and Salvatore Attardo (1994), who expanded it into the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)². These frameworks emphasize the semantic incongruity and pragmatic violations that lie at the heart of humorous communication. Moreover, the study incorporates insights from cultural linguistics, which focuses on the interplay between language and cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian, 2017)³.

From a linguocultural standpoint, anecdotes are fertile ground for exploring how specific national cultures encode shared beliefs, stereotypes, and norms into linguistic forms. They reveal patterns of communication that are deeply embedded in the collective experience of English speakers, particularly in contexts where humor is used to challenge authority, highlight contradictions, or simply amuse through understatement and irony.

Methodology. The present study employs a qualitative methodology grounded in discourse and cultural linguistics to investigate the linguocultural features of English anecdotes. The primary objective is to explore how cultural values, social norms, and pragmatic strategies are embedded within the structure and content of humorous anecdotes in English. For this purpose, a representative corpus of fifty (50) English anecdotes was compiled from diverse sources, including published joke books (e.g., *The Big Book of Jokes*, 2015), online databases such as Reader's Digest and EnglishHumour.com, as well as social media threads known for spreading culturally charged humor.

The selection of anecdotes was based on a purposive sampling strategy. In order to ensure relevance and richness of cultural content, only those anecdotes that contained clear linguistic and cultural markers were included. This included proper nouns (names, nationalities, institutions), idiomatic expressions, culturally specific humor techniques (irony, understatement, sarcasm), and references to social customs or stereotypes (Nosirova, 2025). Furthermore, anecdotes were required to be self-

¹ Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company

² Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

³ Sharifian, F. (2017). *Cultural Linguistics: Cultural Conceptualisations and Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

contained-possessing a beginning, a narrative development, and a punchline-to allow for holistic analysis.

The corpus was then thematically categorized into five primary domains of human interaction where humor is most frequently observed: Family and Domestic Life, Education and Learning, Profession and Workplace, Cultural Stereotypes, Authority and Social Norms.

A combination of discourse analysis, semantic-pragmatic interpretation, and linguocultural contextualization was employed for the study. Each anecdote was analyzed along three dimensions:

- Linguistic features (e.g., wordplay, ellipsis, intonation, modality)
- Pragmatic intent (e.g., face-saving, mockery, subversion)
- Cultural reference frames (e.g., British tea culture, American bluntness, politeness norms)

The objective was not only to reveal humorous intent, but to uncover how cultural knowledge is presupposed and required for the interpretation of humor. For greater depth, a small-scale contrastive element was introduced, comparing select anecdotes with Uzbek humorous short forms, though the primary focus remains on English materials. This methodological triangulation allowed the researcher to assess anecdotes not just as linguistic units but as culturally embedded communicative acts. Their form, function, and effectiveness were evaluated through the lens of linguistic and cultural synergy.

Results and discussion. The analysis of the selected anecdotes revealed several recurring linguocultural patterns that define the English humoristic tradition. While humor is universally appreciated, the mechanisms through which it is delivered vary greatly depending on the cultural and linguistic context. In English anecdotes, humor is often constructed through understatement, politeness inversion, cultural allusion, and script opposition, all of which rely heavily on shared cultural background knowledge.

1. Cultural Stereotyping as a Comic Device. One of the most salient features in English anecdotes is the use of cultural stereotypes-not necessarily in an offensive way, but as a cognitive shortcut to evoke familiarity and expectation. For example: "*Why did the Englishman bring a ladder to the pub? Because he heard the drinks were on the house.*"

This anecdote plays on the literal vs. idiomatic script conflict, while also referencing British pub culture. The humor is activated only if the listener understands the idiom "*on the house*" (meaning free of charge) and contrasts it with its literal meaning, which creates incongruity.

2. Understatement and Politeness Strategy. Understatement is deeply ingrained in British humor and is often used to soften criticism or sarcasm, while simultaneously

amplifying its comic effect. Consider the following: *"He's not the sharpest tool in the shed, but he tries."*

This gentle expression masks a negative evaluation within a seemingly polite tone, creating irony. According to Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, this form of humor adheres to the tact maxim, yet it still subverts expectations, creating a subtle humorous undertone⁴. It is not aggressive, but culturally coded to imply criticism without confrontation.

3. Education and Role Inversion. Another rich source of humor is the education system, particularly involving teacher-student dynamics. Humor arises when the expected power hierarchy is subverted:

Teacher: "What is the future tense of 'I study'?" Student: "I will fail." The joke plays on fatalistic humor, often present in adolescent culture. It also reflects a pragmatic reality—students mock their own academic failure as a coping mechanism. The humor here resonates particularly with societies that emphasize academic achievement.

4. Linguistic Wordplay and Semantic Incongruity. A strong linguistic feature of English humor is wordplay, especially through puns and polysemy. In the following anecdote, humor stems from semantic ambiguity: *"Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana."*

The punchline creates a humorous effect by exploiting the dual meanings of "flies" (verb and noun) and the syntactic ambiguity of the clause. This example supports Attardo's (1994) Script Opposition Theory, where two mental scripts—chronology and biology—are activated and contrasted unexpectedly.

5. Socio-Pragmatic Norm Violation. Many English anecdotes feature direct violations of expected social behavior norms, which is a powerful tool for generating surprise and laughter: *"Patient: Doctor, I feel like nobody is listening to me. Doctor: Next!"*

The doctor's dismissive attitude is socially inappropriate, and its incongruity with expected behavior evokes humor. Such jokes function as pragmatic subversions, mocking professional decorum, and are popular in English-speaking cultures where satire of institutions is widely accepted.

6. Cultural Values and Self-Deprecation. Self-deprecating humor is another cultural marker. It suggests humility and builds rapport: *"I'm on a seafood diet. I see food and I eat it."* This form of humor reflects a non-threatening, socially engaging personality, and is particularly prevalent in American and British anecdotes. According

⁴ Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.

to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, it aligns with low power distance and individualistic cultural traits, where humor is used to reduce hierarchical tension⁵.

These findings affirm that English anecdotes are deeply infused with cultural knowledge, social orientation, and pragmatic norms. Their effectiveness relies not only on structural composition but also on the reader's ability to decode implicit cultural scripts (Nosirova, 2020). The anecdotes use shared stereotypes, language-specific devices, and cultural logic to engage the audience. Importantly, these features are not transferable without context, which reinforces the notion that humor is both a universal and a culture-bound phenomenon.

Conclusion. The conducted research demonstrates that English anecdotes constitute an important element of humorous discourse and serve as a reflection of the cultural and national worldview of English-speaking society. The analysis revealed that the linguocultural specificity of English anecdotes is manifested through irony, implicit meanings, stereotypical representations, cultural codes, and nationally marked communicative strategies.

English anecdotes frequently rely on pragmatic ambiguity, understatement, and contextual humor, which are characteristic features of English communicative culture. Such linguistic means contribute not only to the creation of comic effect but also to the transmission of social evaluations, cultural values, and national mentality.

The study also confirms the close relationship between language and culture in humorous discourse. Anecdotes function as a mechanism for preserving and transmitting cultural experience, social norms, and collective stereotypes. From the linguocultural perspective, they represent valuable material for understanding the peculiarities of national consciousness and intercultural communication.

Thus, the analysis of English anecdotes allows us to conclude that humor acts as an important cultural phenomenon reflecting both linguistic creativity and the worldview of a particular society. Further research may focus on the comparative study of English anecdotes with humorous discourse in other languages and cultures.

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