

THE PUN TECHNIQUE IN ADVERTISING DISCOURSE: A LINGUOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

Islomova Madina Asqarovna

Toshkent iqtisodiyot va pedagogika universiteti

“Tillar va maktabgacha ta’lim”

kafedrasi v/b dotsenti

Email: madinaislomova828@gmail.com

Тел: +998 99 359 25 99

ORCID: ID 0009-0005-5610-1008

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20907144>

Abstract: This article investigates the pun technique in advertising discourse through a linguocultural lens, with a contrastive focus on German and Uzbek advertising materials. The study aims to identify the structural, functional, and culturally embedded properties of puns as they operate across two typologically distinct languages. It argues that puns in advertising texts serve not merely as attention-capturing devices but as sophisticated mechanisms for the transmission of linguocultural information. The methodology integrates discourse analysis, contextual semantics, and linguocultural analysis. Results demonstrate that the interaction between punning strategies and cultural codes produces a distinctive layer of culturally indexed meaning in advertising. The article forms part of a broader DSc research project on the linguocultural interpretation of puns in advertising discourse.

Keywords: pun, wordplay, advertising discourse, linguoculturology, contrastive linguistics, German, Uzbek.

Introduction: Contemporary linguistics has increasingly directed attention toward the manifold dimensions of language play, and the pun — a figure of speech exploiting phonetic, lexical, or grammatical similarity to generate multiple simultaneous meanings — occupies a particularly prominent position within this field.¹ Far from being confined to literary or folkloric registers, puns have become an indispensable tool of modern advertising discourse. The communicative objective of advertising — persuading a prospective consumer to purchase a product or adopt a service — naturally gravitates toward the creative affordances of language, of which the pun is among the most versatile and memorable.

From a linguocultural perspective, however, the pun is not a neutral linguistic artifact. It is a complex semiotic sign that encodes the values,

¹Sannikov, V.Z. (1999). *Russkiy yazyk v zerkale yazykovoy igry* [Russian Language in the Mirror of Language Play]. Moscow: Yazyki russkoy kultury, p. 12.

stereotypes, and cognitive schemata of the culture in which it is embedded.² The study of puns in advertising texts thus positions itself at the intersection of linguistics, semiotics, and cultural studies. This article undertakes a contrastive examination of German and Uzbek advertising discourse, seeking to identify and characterize the linguocultural specificities of punning in each tradition.

The psychological underpinnings of punning were first systematically theorized by Sigmund Freud, who identified jokes and wordplay as mechanisms for releasing psychic energies suppressed in the unconscious.³ This foundational insight was subsequently developed within the frameworks of pragmalinguistics and discourse analysis. Neal Norrick, for instance, characterizes punning as a coordinative device in social interaction, functioning to regulate interpersonal dynamics.⁴ In the advertising context, such functions are deliberately and strategically orchestrated to serve the commercial aims of the text producer.

The relevance of this inquiry is established by three convergent considerations. First, advertising discourse constitutes an influential communicative space that reaches millions of consumers daily, yet the role and function of puns within it remains incompletely theorized. Second, contrastive studies of German and Uzbek advertising traditions are virtually absent from the scholarly literature. Third, linguocultural methodology offers a particularly robust framework for analyzing puns within their cultural context — a framework that has proven productive in related domains of inquiry.

The central aim of the present study is to identify the linguocultural characteristics of puns in German and Uzbek advertising discourse through contrastive analysis, thereby illuminating both their structural configurations and the cultural conditions of their production and reception. This aim is pursued through four subsidiary objectives: (1) to review the theoretical foundations of punning from the perspectives of linguoculturology and pragmalinguistics; (2) to compile and classify a corpus of pun instances drawn from German and Uzbek advertising texts; (3) to compare the structural models of punning across the two language corpora; and (4) to determine the role of the cultural component within each punning configuration.

Literature review: The theoretical study of puns spans several disciplinary traditions. Within formal linguistics, Victor Raskin's Script-Based Semantic

²Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 107.

³Freud, S. (1963). *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (Trans. J. Strachey). New York: Norton, p. 43.

⁴Norrick, N.R. (1993). *Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 56.



Theory of Humor (SSTH) provides the most influential account of the semantic mechanisms underlying humorous language play, including puns.⁵ Raskin proposes that a pun — like other instances of verbal humor — results from the overlap or opposition of two distinct "semantic scripts": cognitive frames that the hearer activates in processing the utterance. The moment of perceived incongruity between these scripts, followed by its resolution, produces the characteristic cognitive-affective response associated with wordplay.

Dirk Delabastita's typological framework classifies puns along four structural dimensions: phonic puns (based on paronomasia or near-homophony), lexical puns (exploiting polysemy or homonymy), grammatical puns (arising from syntactic ambiguity), and intertextual puns (which activate recognizable quotations or cultural allusions).⁶ This taxonomy, though developed primarily in the context of translation studies, has proven widely applicable across discourse types and is adopted, with adaptations, in the present study.

The linguocultural framework applied here draws principally on the tradition established by Russian and post-Soviet scholars. G.V. Kolshanskiy's contextual-semantic method provides analytical tools for examining how meaning is co-constructed by linguistic form and extralinguistic context.⁷ V.V. Vorobyov's linguocultural theory conceptualizes the linguocultural unit as a sign that simultaneously encodes linguistic meaning and cultural content.⁸ V.A. Maslova's synthesis of the field identifies linguoculturology as the study of language as a repository and transmitter of cultural memory.⁹

Within advertising linguistics specifically, Guy Cook's discourse analytic approach treats advertising texts as polyfunctional communicative events operating across verbal, visual, and sonic channels.¹⁰ Geoffrey Leech's early study of English advertising language identified phonaesthetic appeal — the pleasurable qualities of sound patterning — as a primary resource of the genre,¹¹ a finding that anticipates the prominence of phonic punning in our corpus.

⁵Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, p. 99.

⁶Delabastita, D. (1997). *Traductio: Essays on Punning and Translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome, pp. 1–22.

⁷Kolshanskiy, G.V. (1980). *Kontekstnaya semantika [Contextual Semantics]*. Moscow: Nauka, p. 78.

⁸Vorobyov, V.V. (1997). *Lingvokulturologiya: teoriya i metody [Linguoculturology: Theory and Methods]*. Moscow: RUDN, p. 36.

⁹Maslova, V.A. (2001). *Lingvokulturologiya [Linguoculturology]*. Moscow: Academia, p. 27.

¹⁰Cook, G. (1992). *The Discourse of Advertising*. London: Routledge, p. 18.

¹¹Leech, G. (1966). *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain*. London: Longmans, p. 59.



Vestergaard and Schroder extended this analysis to demonstrate that advertising rhetoric is systematically calibrated to the assumed cultural competences of its target audience.¹²

Scholarship on humour in Uzbek language and literary tradition has established a distinct indigenous framework for understanding wordplay. Yo'qubov's monograph on the linguistic means of humour in Uzbek identifies oral-formulaic traditions — proverbs, riddles, and epic verse — as the primary matrices within which Uzbek wordplay developed historically,¹³ a finding that bears directly on the cultural referentiality of puns in our Uzbek corpus.

Methodology: The corpus for this study was assembled through systematic sampling of advertising materials produced between 2018 and 2024. The German subcorpus comprises 350 advertising texts drawn from the Deutsche Werbung archive and the advertising supplements of Der Spiegel weekly magazine. The Uzbek subcorpus comprises 280 advertising texts sampled from Uzbekistan National Television broadcasts, the Kun.uz digital news platform, and print advertising in major Uzbek-language newspapers. From these materials, instances of punning were identified through close reading by two trained annotators, yielding 127 German and 96 Uzbek pun tokens, subsequently cross-checked for inter-rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.84$).

Each identified pun was coded along four dimensions: (a) structural type, following Delabastita's taxonomy¹⁴; (b) semantic mechanism, following Raskin's SSTH categories¹⁵; (c) pragmatic function (attention capture, brand association, emotional priming, or mnemonic reinforcement); and (d) cultural referentiality (local folklore, national history, religious tradition, international popular culture, or product-specific neologism). Coding was performed in ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software.

Quantitative analysis involved frequency tabulation and chi-square testing for between-group differences in structural type distribution. Qualitative analysis followed an interpretative phenomenological approach, subjecting selected pun

¹²Vestergaard, T. & Schroder, K. (1985). *The Language of Advertising*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 74.

¹³Yo'qubov, Yu. (1994). *O'zbek tilida yumorning lisoniy vositalari* [Linguistic Means of Humour in Uzbek]. Tashkent: Adabiyot va san'at, p. 45.



tokens to extended close reading. To assess the mnemonic effectiveness of punning in advertising, a supplementary recall experiment was conducted with 200 participants (100 per language group), presented with matched pairs of punning and non-punning advertisements for equivalent product categories, and asked to recall advertisement content after a 48-hour delay.

The contextual-semantic method developed by Kolshanskiy¹⁶ was applied to situate each pun within its broader textual and extratextual environment, and the linguocultural analytical procedure outlined by Maslova¹⁷ was employed to identify culturally encoded content layers. Cook's discourse analytic framework¹⁸ was used to examine the interplay of verbal and visual channels in multimodal pun instantiations.

Results: The structural distribution of pun types across the two subcorpora diverges significantly ($\chi^2 = 14.73$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$). In the German subcorpus ($n = 127$), lexical puns constituted the largest category at 41% ($n = 52$), followed by phonic puns at 38% ($n = 48$), grammatical puns at 11% ($n = 14$), and intertextual puns at 10% ($n = 13$). In the Uzbek subcorpus ($n = 96$), phonic puns were overwhelmingly predominant at 52% ($n = 50$), followed by lexical puns at 33% ($n = 32$), and both grammatical and intertextual puns at 7% each ($n = 7$ per category).

The preponderance of phonic punning in Uzbek advertising is a striking finding. Geoffrey Leech's observation that advertising language must achieve phonaesthetic appeal¹⁹ is clearly borne out by Uzbek advertising practice, but the mechanism is inflected by indigenous oral-literary conventions: alliterative and rhyming patterns drawn from classical Uzbek poetic forms (ghazal, rubaiy) are recognizably present in the sound patterning of phonic puns. Vestergaard and Schroder's observation that advertising rhetoric is calibrated to audience cultural competences²⁰ finds empirical support here: Uzbek advertisers systematically



activate phonic schemata that are deeply familiar to their audience from poetic tradition.

In the German subcorpus, the dominance of lexical punning — particularly the deliberate exploitation of polysemous lexical items — reflects a readership disposition toward cognitively demanding wordplay. Henri Bergson's foundational analysis of laughter identifies the comic as inherently social, dependent on the shared cognitive frames of a given community,²¹ and this is precisely what German lexical puns activate: the shared semantic competence required to retrieve both meanings of an ambiguous term simultaneously.

With respect to cultural referentiality, Uzbek puns demonstrated significantly higher rates of reference to national folklore (proverbs and epics: 34%), Islamic cultural values (18%), and local toponymic or ethnographic content (12%), compared with the German subcorpus (9%, 3%, and 5% respectively). German puns, by contrast, displayed higher rates of reference to international literary and philosophical allusion (22%) and scientific-technical concepts used in figurative senses (17%).

An illustrative case from the Uzbek subcorpus is the advertising slogan of the cosmetics brand "Go'zal", in which the brand name — meaning 'beautiful' in Uzbek — simultaneously functions as a lexical descriptor of the advertised product and as a proper noun denoting the brand identity. Frank Yus's relevance-theoretic account of humour²² predicts that such puns generate heightened cognitive engagement precisely because the hearer must perform dual semantic processing, and that this additional cognitive effort yields a proportionally stronger memory trace. The recall experiment conducted in this study confirms this prediction: pun-containing advertisements were recalled by 73% of participants in the 48-hour delayed recall condition, compared with 49% recall for matched non-punning advertisements ($n = 200$, $p < 0.05$).

The lexical richness of Uzbek²³ and the productive morphological system of Uzbek word formation²⁴ supply resources for punning that are structurally

²¹Bergson, H. (1911). *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Trans. C. Brereton & F. Rothwell). London: Macmillan, p. 29.

²²Yus, F. (2003). Humour and Relevance Theory. *Pragmatics*, 13(2), 309–328.

²³Begmatov, E. & Mamatov, A.E. (2008). *O'zbek tilining lug'aviy boyligi* [Lexical Richness of the Uzbek Language]. Tashkent: Fan, p. 112.

²⁴Safarov, Sh. (2008). *Pragmalingvistika* [Pragmalinguistics]. Tashkent: O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, p. 68.



distinct from those available in German. Uzbek's agglutinative morphology, for instance, permits the construction of compound forms that can simultaneously instantiate two semantic readings through suffix manipulation — a punning strategy with no direct equivalent in German's primarily flexional morphological system.

Discussion: The findings reported above invite a reconsideration of the pun's status in advertising discourse theory. Charles Hockett's classic formulation defines the pun as the instantiation of two or more simultaneous "channels" within a single acoustic or graphic signal.²⁵ In advertising discourse, this simultaneity is not accidental but strategically engineered: the congruence between brand name and ordinary lexical item, the covert laudation of product qualities embedded in apparent semantic playfulness, and the induction of positive affect in the consumer — all of these communicative goals are achieved through the single mechanism of the pun.

A critical question arising from the contrastive analysis concerns translatability. The present findings indicate that phonic puns in the Uzbek subcorpus are, in the overwhelming majority of cases, untranslatable into German without significant loss of the punning effect, because they are anchored in the phonological system of Uzbek and in culturally specific sonic schemata. This observation aligns with Delabastita's analysis of the translator's predicament when confronted with wordplay.²⁶ In the advertising context, this implies that localization — the culturally adaptive reformulation of advertising content for a new target market — cannot proceed through direct translation of pun structures but must instead identify functionally equivalent punning strategies within the target language's own resources.

Albrecht Zirker and Esme Winter-Froemel's metalinguistic approach²⁷ proposes that puns be treated not merely as linguistic phenomena but as self-referential discursive strategies: in producing a pun, the speaker does not only mean something but simultaneously draws attention to the linguistic means by which meaning is produced. In the advertising context, this self-referentiality has a distinctive commercial valence: the punning advertisement implicitly positions

²⁵Hockett, C.F. (1973). Jokes. *Semiotica*, 1, 150–185.

²⁷Zirker, A. & Winter-Froemel, E. (Eds.) (2015). *Wordplay and Metalinguistic / Metadiscursive Reflection*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 33–55.



the brand as linguistically sophisticated and culturally attuned, attributes that transfer metonymically to the advertised product.

The regulatory dimension of advertising discourse must also be acknowledged. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Advertising²⁸ requires that advertising content respect the cultural values and traditions of the audience — a provision that structurally incentivizes advertisers to activate local cultural codes, including those embedded in traditional wordplay. No comparable statutory provision exists in German advertising law, and this legal asymmetry may partially account for the divergent patterns of cultural referentiality documented in our corpus.

From a broader linguocultural perspective, the findings of this study demonstrate that the pun in advertising discourse is simultaneously a linguistic and a cultural artifact: it does not merely play with language but speaks in the language of a culture, encoding its values, its aesthetic preferences, and its cognitive habits. This dual character suggests the theoretical utility of a dedicated construct — the "linguocultural field of the pun" — defined as the ensemble of linguistic resources, cultural referents, and communicative norms that constrain and enable punning within a given language community. The present study provides empirical grounding for the elaboration of this construct in future research.

Conclusion: This study has demonstrated that the pun, as deployed in advertising discourse, constitutes a linguistically and culturally complex phenomenon that cannot be adequately described by formal or purely semantic accounts alone. Contrastive analysis of German and Uzbek advertising materials has yielded four principal conclusions.

First, the structural distribution of pun types differs significantly between the two corpora. Phonic punning predominates in Uzbek advertising, while lexical punning prevails in the German corpus. These distributional patterns are not random but reflect systematic properties of the respective languages' phonological and lexical-semantic systems, as well as the aesthetic traditions and audience expectations that advertising producers seek to activate.

Second, the cultural referentiality of puns diverges substantially between the two contexts. Uzbek advertising puns draw predominantly on national folklore, Islamic cultural values, and local ethnographic content; German advertising puns more frequently invoke international literary, philosophical, and scientific frames

²⁸Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Advertising (1998). Tashkent, Article 4.



of reference. This divergence is consistent with broader patterns of cultural self-representation in each advertising tradition.

Third, puns demonstrably enhance the mnemonic effectiveness of advertising. Participants exposed to pun-containing advertisements recalled the advertised content at a rate of 73% after 48 hours, compared with 49% for matched non-punning advertisements — a statistically significant difference that has direct implications for advertising strategy.

Fourth, the linguocultural analytical framework has proven productive for the study of advertising puns, enabling a simultaneous account of their formal properties and their cultural embeddedness. The theoretical construct of the "linguocultural field of the pun" is proposed as a framework for organizing future inquiry in this domain.

Future research directions include: (1) a systematic investigation of the translation and localization of advertising puns across the German-Uzbek language pair; (2) analysis of punning strategies in digital and social media advertising, where the interplay of text, image, and sound creates new multimodal resources for wordplay; and (3) experimental investigation of the differential cognitive processing of phonic versus lexical puns across culturally distinct audience groups. The present article represents a contribution to a broader DSc research programme on the linguocultural interpretation of puns in advertising discourse.

References:

1. Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
2. Begmatov, E. & Mamatov, A.E. (2008). *O'zbek tilining lug'aviy boyligi* [Lexical Richness of the Uzbek Language]. Tashkent: Fan.
3. Bergson, H. (1911). *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Trans. C. Brereton & F. Rothwell). London: Macmillan.
4. Cook, G. (1992). *The Discourse of Advertising*. London: Routledge.
5. Delabastita, D. (1997). *Traductio: Essays on Punning and Translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
6. Freud, S. (1963). *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (Trans. J. Strachey). New York: Norton.
7. Hockett, C.F. (1973). Jokes. *Semiotica*, 1, 150–185.
8. Kolshanskiy, G.V. (1980). *Kontekstnaya semantika* [Contextual Semantics]. Moscow: Nauka.
9. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Advertising (1998). Tashkent.
10. Leech, G. (1966). *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain*. London: Longmans.



- 11.Maslova, V.A. (2001). Lingvokulturologiya [Linguoculturology]. Moscow: Academia.
- 12.Norrick, N.R. (1993). Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talk. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 13.Raskin, V. (1985). Semantic Mechanisms of Humor. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- 14.Safarov, Sh. (2008). Pragmalingvistika [Pragmalinguistics]. Tashkent: O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi.
- 15.Sannikov, V.Z. (1999). Russkiy yazyk v zerkale yazykovoy igry [Russian Language in the Mirror of Language Play]. Moscow: Yazyki russkoy kultury.
- 16.Vestergaard, T. & Schroder, K. (1985). The Language of Advertising. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 17.Vorobyov, V.V. (1997). Lingvokulturologiya: teoriya i metody [Linguoculturology: Theory and Methods]. Moscow: RUDN.
- 18.Yo'qubov, Yu. (1994). O'zbek tilida yumorning lisoniy vositalari [Linguistic Means of Humour in Uzbek]. Tashkent: Adabiyot va san'at.
- 19.Yus, F. (2003). Humour and Relevance Theory. Pragmatics, 13(2), 309–328.
- 20.Zirker, A. & Winter-Froemel, E. (Eds.) (2015). Wordplay and Metalinguistic / Metadiscursive Reflection. Berlin: De Gruyter.

