

**WORDPLAY TRANSLATION IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH-UZBEK DUBBING IN
ZOOTOPIA**

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Abstract

The translation of wordplay remains one of the most challenging aspects of audiovisual translation due to the complex interaction between linguistic, cultural, and semiotic elements. This study investigates the translation strategies employed in the Uzbek dubbing of the animated film *Zootopia*, focusing on the rendering of English wordplay into Uzbek. Audiovisual texts are characterized by multimodal communication in which verbal expressions are closely connected to visual and acoustic components. Consequently, translators often face semiotic constraints that limit the possibility of preserving the formal features of wordplay. Using Dirk Delabastita's taxonomy of wordplay translation strategies as a theoretical framework, this study examines four examples extracted from the film and compares the source and target language versions. The findings reveal that the Uzbek dubbing predominantly employs the Pun-to-Non-Pun strategy, prioritizing pragmatic effectiveness and functional adequacy over formal linguistic equivalence. While phonetic and rhyming patterns present in the original English dialogue are frequently lost, translators compensate through descriptive adaptation, cultural localization, and visual anchoring. The study concludes that the linguistic differences between English and Uzbek, together with the multimodal constraints of audiovisual translation, necessitate a shift from formal reproduction toward communicative effectiveness and audience comprehension.

Keywords: wordplay, audiovisual translation, dubbing, *Zootopia*, Uzbek translation, pun translation, pragmatic adaptation, Delabastita.

Introduction

Wordplay is a linguistic phenomenon that exploits similarities in sound, spelling, or meaning to generate humorous, stylistic, or rhetorical effects. According to Winter-Froemel (2016), wordplay functions through the simultaneous activation of multiple meanings and interpretations, creating a form of linguistic creativity that often challenges conventional communication. In audiovisual products such as films,

television programs, and animated features, wordplay contributes significantly to characterization, humor, and narrative development.

The translation of wordplay becomes particularly problematic in audiovisual contexts because translators must operate within a multimodal environment where language interacts with visual and acoustic signs. As Huber and Lideikytė (2021) emphasize, audiovisual translation is not merely linguistic transfer but also the preservation of semiotic cohesion among verbal, visual, and auditory channels. In dubbing, additional technical constraints such as lip synchronization, timing, and character movement further complicate the translation process (Aleksandrova, 2020).

The animated film *Zootopia* provides a rich source of linguistic creativity, featuring numerous puns, rhymes, alliterations, and humorous nicknames that contribute to the personalities of its characters. Many of these wordplays rely on English phonological patterns and cultural associations that have no direct equivalents in Uzbek. Therefore, the translation of such expressions requires strategic adaptation to ensure that the communicative purpose of the original dialogue remains effective for the target audience.

This article investigates how English wordplay in *Zootopia* has been translated into Uzbek and identifies the dominant translation strategies employed in the dubbing process. The study aims to determine whether translators prioritize formal equivalence or functional adequacy and to examine the influence of audiovisual constraints on translation decisions.

The study adopts Dirk Delabastita's classification of wordplay translation strategies as its primary theoretical framework. Delabastita distinguishes several possible approaches to translating puns, including Pun-to-Pun, Pun-to-Non-Pun, Pun-to-Related Rhetorical Device, Pun-to-Zero, and Editorial Techniques. Among these, the Pun-to-Non-Pun strategy is frequently observed when direct linguistic equivalence is impossible due to structural differences between source and target languages.

The challenge of translating English wordplay into Uzbek is intensified by the typological distance between the two languages. English belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, whereas Uzbek is a Turkic language characterized by agglutinative morphology and different phonological patterns. Consequently, phonetic relationships such as rhyme, alliteration, homophony, and paronymy that form the basis of many English puns often cannot be reproduced directly in Uzbek.

Functionalist approaches to translation provide an alternative perspective. Reiß (1983) argues that the translator's primary task is not necessarily to preserve linguistic form but rather to maintain the communicative function of the text. Within audiovisual translation, this principle is particularly important because dialogue must remain consistent with visual information and audience expectations. Scholars of audiovisual

translation further note that translators often prioritize cultural adaptation and expressive equivalence to ensure that the target audience experiences an effect comparable to that intended for the original audience.

Therefore, the translation of wordplay in dubbed films frequently involves a shift from formal equivalence toward pragmatic and functional adequacy. This tendency is especially visible when verbal humor is visually anchored to specific characters, actions, or settings.

Analysis of Wordplay Translation in *Zootopia*

Source Text: “Hey, if it isn’t the Flopsy the Copsy”

Target Text: “Iya bu anavi uzun quloq zobitku”

The expression “Flopsy the Copsy” demonstrates rhyming paronymy through the phonetic similarity between “Flopsy” and “Copsy.” The nickname also evokes literary associations with rabbit characters, thereby creating a humorous and dismissive tone.

In the Uzbek version, the rhyme and literary allusion are completely omitted. Instead, the translator uses the phrase “uzun quloq zobit” (“long-eared officer”), emphasizing the rabbit’s most visible physical characteristic. According to Delabastita’s classification, this represents a clear example of the Pun-to-Non-Pun strategy. Although the phonological humor disappears, the translation maintains verbal-visual coherence because the audience can immediately connect the phrase with the on-screen appearance of Judy Hopps.

The adaptation demonstrates how audiovisual constraints influence translation choices. The translator prioritizes recognizability and characterization over formal reproduction of the original wordplay.

Alliterative Paronymy

Source Text: “You’re dead, Bunny Bumpkin”

Target Text: “Uzun quloq tamom bo‘lding”

The phrase “Bunny Bumpkin” employs alliteration through the repetition of the initial consonant sound /b/. In addition to its phonetic effect, the expression carries a condescending and insulting meaning, portraying Judy as naïve and inexperienced.

The Uzbek translation abandons the alliterative structure and instead conveys the threatening intention through the phrase “tamom bo‘lding” (“you’re finished”). The addition of “uzun quloq” preserves the rabbit reference while maintaining consistency with the visual representation of the character.

This example illustrates a shift from linguistic creativity to pragmatic effectiveness. The translator sacrifices phonetic play but successfully transfers the emotional force and interpersonal dynamics of the scene.

Phonetic Play and Nicknaming

Source Text: “Alright Slick Nick, you’re under arrest”

Target Text: “Hoy shoshmay turchi hibsga olinding”

The nickname “Slick Nick” relies on rhyme and characterization. The adjective “slick” highlights Nick Wilde’s cunning and manipulative personality while simultaneously creating a memorable phonetic pattern.

In the Uzbek version, the nickname is omitted entirely. The translation focuses exclusively on the arrest situation and communicates the immediate narrative action. As a result, the humorous characterization embedded in the original phrase is lost.

From a theoretical perspective, this example again demonstrates the Pun-to-Non-Pun strategy. The translator prioritizes semantic clarity and narrative progression over preserving the stylistic qualities of the original dialogue.

Rhyming and Cultural Status

Source Text: “Hey there, Jude the dude”

Target Text: “Salom super qahramon!”

The English expression employs rhyme between “Jude” and “dude,” creating a friendly and informal greeting. The phrase reflects camaraderie and positive social interaction.

Rather than attempting to reproduce the rhyme, the Uzbek translator introduces the phrase “super qahramon” (“superhero”), which functions as a culturally familiar form of praise. This adaptation changes the rhetorical mechanism while preserving the positive interpersonal function of the utterance.

The example demonstrates how translators may replace phonological wordplay with culturally meaningful expressions that generate a similar communicative effect for the target audience.

Discussion: Visual Anchoring and Functional Adequacy

The analysis reveals a consistent pattern in the Uzbek dubbing of *Zootopia*. Rather than attempting to reproduce English phonetic wordplay, translators frequently employ descriptive expressions and culturally adapted phrases. One particularly notable tendency is the repeated use of “uzun quloq” (“long ear”) as a substitute for various English rabbit-related nicknames.

This strategy can be explained through the concept of visual anchoring. In audiovisual texts, dialogue cannot be considered independently from the visual channel. Since Judy Hopps is visually represented as a rabbit throughout the film, references to her long ears establish a strong connection between verbal and visual information. Such multimodal consistency contributes to audience comprehension and maintains narrative cohesion.

The findings further support functionalist theories of translation, which prioritize communicative effectiveness over formal equivalence. Although the original phonetic humor is often lost, the translations successfully preserve characterization, interpersonal relationships, and narrative coherence. Consequently, the Uzbek dubbing

demonstrates a preference for adequacy rather than equivalence in the strict linguistic sense.

Conclusion

This study examined the translation of English wordplay into Uzbek in the dubbed version of *Zootopia*. The analysis demonstrated that direct preservation of phonetic wordplay is rare due to substantial linguistic differences between English and Uzbek and the semiotic constraints inherent in audiovisual translation.

The dominant strategy identified throughout the corpus is Pun-to-Non-Pun, whereby rhyming, alliterative, and phonetic puns are replaced with descriptive, pragmatic, or culturally adapted expressions. Translators consistently prioritize functional adequacy, audience comprehension, and visual coherence over formal linguistic equivalence.

While such adaptations inevitably result in the loss of certain stylistic and humorous features present in the source text, they enable the target audience to access the narrative and emotional content effectively. The findings suggest that successful audiovisual translation depends not on reproducing linguistic form but on recreating communicative function within the constraints of the target language and culture.

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