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The significant traits of English humor

Laughter is what unites everyone on the Earth. But do we always laugh at the same things? Just like people of the same nation are united by unique language, they are united by unique humor. Understanding significant traits and nature of such cultural phenomenon as English humor is very important for expanding one's social outlook and increasing the efficiency of learning English; this is what determines the relevancy of my study.

Cultural experience is what makes us find English jokes funny. We need context. What are the main features of English humor? "The Great British Mag" differentiates the following:

1. Sarcasm and irony — satirical exposure, mockery.
2. Satire — humiliating denunciation of phenomena with the help of various comic means.
3. Banter — a jokey conversation between friends that involves good-natured teasing
4. Gloominess
5. Everyday life
6. Understatement (exaggeration) — a stylistic figure of explicit and intentional distortion in order to enhance the expressiveness and emphasize the said thought.
7. The absurd — something illogical, ridiculous, contrary to common sense.
8. British Class system
9. Social awkwardness
10. Innuendo — an allusion, an indirect remark or hint, usually suggestive or dismissive. A completely unique phenomenon in comedy, which is a statement or action, completely innocent at first glance, but containing a rude, critical, offensive and simply indecent subtext. For example:

"She's the kind of girl who climbed the ladder of success wrong by wrong"

If everything is clear with classical humor, then what about modern humor? In what form does it exist now? At the beginning of the XIX century, a new comedy genre was born in Britain — stand-up. It involves a solo performance of the artist in front of the audience and communication with it. Is it fair to say that stand-up has adopted the features of traditional English humor? To answer this question, we analyzed performances of British comedians:

- Sarah Millikan "Home bird"
- Jimmy Carr "Jimmy Carr's Guide on United Kingdom"
- Dylan Moran "Monster"
- Joe Brand "Joe Brand at Apollo"

We conducted an analysis — each of the performances was divided into blocks, the material of which is combined according to the principle of the English humor's significant traits featured in them, then the number of jokes, bits and stories was counted. The most common turned out to be sarcasm, social awkwardness and exaggeration. There is almost no theme of the British Class system. As part of the research, we translated a fragment of Jimmy Carr's show. The said comedian is a vivid example of British stand-up, he's winner of the British Comedy Awards, actor and writer.

Before choosing a fragment for translation, we put forward the criteria:

- The joke must have at least three significant traits of classic English humor.
- A joke should not be based on an untranslatable wordplay.

To work on the translation, we created the following algorithm:

1. Firstly, watch the video in its entirety, without pauses.
2. Watch the video again, this time taking notes. Note the fragments of the speech that interest you or seem to be the most complicating.
3. Select one fragment from several marked ones. It is necessary to choose a joke that most vividly reflects the features of English humor.
4. Revise the selected fragment, write it down. The accent and the speed of the comedian's speech complicate this step, so review it several times to make sure that the text is complete.

5. Reread the original text. Before translating a joke, you need to make sure that original is grammatically and syntactically correct.

6. The actual translation.

7. Edit of the translated text (grammar, punctuation, syntax).

The selected fragment combines several characteristic features of English humor at once, namely understatement, absurdity, gloom, everyday life and satire.

Said traits make the joke understandable and funny for the English audience, but it causes confusion for a foreign one. And there is an explanation for this — we do not have enough understanding of what real Englishmen are, not those who are competently created by screenwriters and authors. There really is a difference between them.

The very nature of humor lies not only in thought, but also in its form (everyone who has ever tried to explain a joke to another person knows that without the proper form, humor simply ceases to exist). The translation of humor is always characterized by special complexity, and also requires an individual and creative approach on the part of the translator. The main difficulty in translating jokes is the lack of background knowledge in the culture of the people whose joke is being translated. Translation of replicas related to cultural situations, or the absence of equivalent vocabulary in Russian, often causes a number of difficulties for the translator, especially in the absence of some base of already known information.

Since our work turned out to be quite large-scale, when the question arose of how to reflect its result, it was not easy to make a choice. The product must be:

- Visual, because the project topic needs visual and auditory support, and ideally should be illustrated with a video sequence.
- Useful when learning a language, because it was the initial purpose of the study.
- Convenient to use and demonstrate.

The site seemed to be the best option under these conditions. So the work on the blog "What's the joke, sir?" began. It is the blog format that allows you to constantly add new articles, headings, videos with comedians' performances, as well as many other content. The interface is intuitive – the main page is watcher's feed, where all the new posts and articles are shown, all the main buttons can be found in a convenient menu.

At the moment, the site contains articles, collections of English jokes, TV series and stand-up comedians, in the future it is planned to replenish it and develop it as an educational resource for students of English as a foreign language.

We needed a way to make the site accessible to everyone. To do this, we have developed a small handbook. In addition to recommendations for students, it also contains a QR code link, by clicking on which the reader will visit our blog and will be able to learn more about the topic.

In the modern world, English has a special status. It is not enough just to know the language, it is also necessary to study the culture of the country of the language being studied, since humor is an integral part of the life and speech culture of the British.

Thus, we have identified the characteristic features of English humor, we have proved that these features are inherent in both classical and modern English comedy. We also translated a fragment of a stand-up performance by a British comedian while preserving the highlighted features, prepared a website and a handbook to disseminate the results of our research.

The practical value of this work lies in the fact that the materials, observations, conclusions and research products can be applied in learning English both with the help of a teacher and independently.