

Plekhanov Russian University of Economics

Group essay contest

**«Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World.
Time for Equal Opportunities»**

Group work (essay)

**«The similarities and differences between the Russian, American
and British sense of humor»**

Participants:

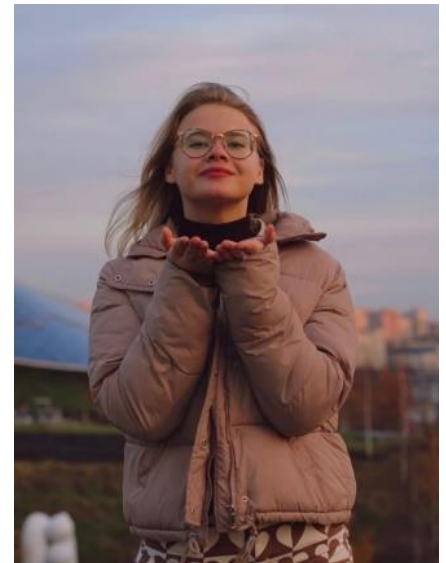
Kuznetsova Yana



Magerramova Narmina



Vasina Anastasia



Supervisor: PhD Ershova Olga Vladimirovna

Moscow
2022

Российский экономический университет имени Г.В. Плеханова

Командный конкурс эссе

**«Единство в различии: Россия и англоязычный мир. Время
равных возможностей»**

Групповая работа (эссе)

**«Сходства и различия российского, английского и
американского чувства юмора»**

Участники:

Кузнецова Яна



Магеррамова Нармина



Васина Анастасия



Научный руководитель: к.пед.н. Ершова Ольга Владимировна

Москва
2022

The similarities and differences between the Russian, American and British sense of humor

Kuznetsova Yana, Magerramova Narmina, Vasina Anastasia

Theses:

1. Laughter is expressed variously in the text in different countries, but its essence does not change. The defining factor is what nation is laughing at.
2. The anecdote is the best literary genre for studying the characteristics of national humor for many reasons.
3. Great English humor cannot exist without sarcasm and cynicism.
4. American humor is the brainchild of Jewish one. If Americans talk about national peculiarities, they consider them more a cause for pride than for irony.
5. Black humor and self-irony are the Russians' strong suit.
6. We are similar in many ways: from the ability to notice the unusual in everyday life, to a love of positivity and a deep understanding of our own national peculiarities.

The similarities and differences between the Russian, American and British sense of humor

Kuznetsova Yana, Magerramova Narmina, Vasina Anastasia

«Axaxaxxa», «hahaha», «hah, lol» - these are the ways that people from different countries express the one, perhaps the most beautiful emotion in the world - laughter. These countries are well known, and by no means «from different plates», the Russian Federation, the United States of America, and Great Britain. Could you tell which of these sets of letters refers to which country? I don't think so... Try, anyway. You will try to guess, because just by carefully studying this topic, you know for sure that only Russians express their written laughter starting with the letter «a», by the way, often using brackets-smiles «)))», which is totally misunderstood by our American friends. They use brackets only for their intended purpose and think that the main character in laughter is the «h», and that the acronym «lol» is a British personally invented expression, which the whole world has borrowed, but no one uses it as often as the creators do. It is not how a person laughs, whether written or spoken, that is much more important, but what he does it at. (Pic. 1) W. Minzer said, «a person can be judged by what he laughs at». [9, p.1] What seems very funny to one may be strange, offensive, or dull in two senses. Externally very similar residents of the three countries have very dissimilar mental content, largely due to such factors as mentality, history, and cultural heritage, which shape the national sense of humor. Now by the example of these previously mentioned three countries you will see how dramatically different humor can be, the laughter at which in face-to-face format is identical, and in written speech differs by a single letter.

Plato said: «You cannot understand the serious without the funny». [7, p.256] Through witty short stories, society's stereotypes, character and human actions are best clarified. The name of these stories is jokes, and their home is humor. No one will argue that humor is not to be found in any particular literary

genre, it pervades all of people' daily lives. There are many different elements of humor: ditties, stand-up, funny songs, puns, sketches, caricatures, and so on. However, there is no better example to consider than anecdotes for the following reasons. (Pic. 2) To begin with, they are short and universal to understand, that is, they do not require complex analysis. Moreover, they are a much better reflection of the sense of humor of an entire people, since, for example, the humorous works of specific literary figures bear the imprint of their words and vision of the world. Consider Mark Twain with his unfailing sarcasm, or Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, the founder of satire in Russian literature. Each of them was unique, so we would have to look at all the literary geniuses of different countries to get a general idea of jokes. Finally, jokes are timeless: no matter how long ago they appeared among the people, they still cause a burst of laughter-perhaps because of this they do not disappear from the memory of the nation. So, let's look at the differences and similarities in the humor of each of these three nations with this genre in view.

Sarcasm, a mug of tea, and a pince-nez - what is it? An English gentleman. As for the last two attributes - these are common stereotypes, but as for the first - it so happens that the English are quite cynical, sarcastic and sometimes even rude when it comes to jokes. Apparently, they live by N.M. Karamzin's rule: «It is not a sin to laugh at anything that seems funny». [6, p.374] Take as an example a joke from a British soap opera: «So, Mr. Bean, what do you think of this picture? -This picture is great because it's HUGE, because if it were MICROscopic, no one would see it!» You can judge the nationality of this skit not only by the name of Rowan Atkinson's character, whose photograph in ordinary life and in stage persona you can see in the appendix, (Pic. 3) but also by its essence of cynicism about art, sarcasm and denunciation. «Blackness», you say. «Great English humor», experts and amateurs from around the world will answer you. Much of the peculiarity of this humor is because the typical English gentleman is always obliged to «keep his

face» and keep his composure, so that when it comes to comedy, characters who can be called unpleasant at best are popular. A classic example is Bernard Black from «Black's Bookshop», played by Dylan Moran, or John Cleese as Basil Fawlty from «Fawlty Towers». Both are rude to their customers and not too courteous to their loved ones, and this contributes to an incredible comic effect. This same innate cynicism allows the English, including these comedians, to make masterful jokes about themselves and ridicule their own failings, vices, and weaknesses. Self-criticism is one of the main themes of British humor. This is the flip side of «sarcasm»: seeing your own shortcomings and working on yourself. Isn't that what all decent gentlemen from all over the world have in common? That's exactly what it is. So, it is precisely the «British» spicy peppered presentation which is certainly a national peculiarity. Even their close American friends do not use this trick.

As for them, their humor is most characterized by a great deal of farce and physical comedy (gesticulation). The style of observational humor is very much at the core of American comedy, as it seeks to point out obvious aspects of American culture and social discourse, while at the same time emphasizing their ridiculousness. The strongest influence in shaping American humor was the influx of Jewish comedians and their respective Jewish humor, including some of the most influential: The Three Stooges, The Marx Brothers, Lenny Bruce, Rodney Dangerfield, Jackie Mason, Woody Allen, and South American comedians appearing on famous television shows like The Jeffersons, Saturday Night Live and The Cosby Show. A great example of typical American humor is found in a famous anecdote: «A father drives by a cemetery: -Did you know it's a popular cemetery? - Yes, people are really dying to get there!» It's an old joke, familiar to many Americans since childhood. A non-English speaker may not immediately understand what the joke is about, while its meaning lies in the pun. Here it is in an idiom «dying to do something» that means «wanting to do something intensely», so people are just dying to get into the cemetery. This

double meaning can bring a smile, as can the metaphor for America's love of prestige in all things (Pic. 4), and the difficulty of understanding shows that to appreciate most foreign jokes you have to be fluent in the language of the joke-makers. Irony as in this anecdote toward one's own national characteristics is characteristic not only of Americans, but also of their Russian and British friends, but the boundless love of «gimmically packaging» is unique to them, and as Britons and Russians they openly acknowledge their non-ideality, using it as a theme for jokes.

And then finally, let's talk about the Russians, who are also endowed with a brilliant sense of humor. A man who sits glowering in the Moscow subway can be a joker and a jester if you get to know him better or even have a drink or two together. And you're likely to laugh him to tears with stories that didn't end up being funny at all. According to most Americans who know Russia well, the most appropriate definition of Russian humor is «black». Of course, there is a wide variety of jokes, but as always, frustration and grief are a common theme, and people in Russia know this better than anyone else. As the Russian proverb says, «what the heart thinks the tongue speaks». Russian humor, which is mostly self-deprecating, helps us to take more easily the injustice and suffering which Russians have had more than enough of, especially in the last century. In this connection one Russian anecdote comes to mind. «A man is walking down the street with a spear in his chest, another runs up to him and says: Wow! Doesn't it hurt you? - No, only when I laugh.» The heroes of Russian jokes are varied: animals (typical Russian fairy tales bears, foxes, wolves, etc.), characters from literature and film (Stirlitz, the Three Bogatyrs, Crocodile Gena and Cheburashka (Pic. 5)), politicians, and ordinary people. Russians not only do not try to choose their expressions, they also love absurdity. The story of a bear walking through the woods, seeing his car on fire, getting in it and burnt to death is one of the most telling in this context. It does not make sense, it is confusing, but it is fun to watch the reaction of the listener. The main difference from

British and American humor is that the Russians are not afraid to offend or put on the spot. At the same time, any nation tends to touch on controversial topics, and Russia is no exception.

After dissecting and examining the humor of each nation, we can draw some conclusions. Indeed, in humor there are many similarities: starting with the ability to notice little things in everyday life, a love for the positive and ending with a deep understanding of your own national features. In doing so, the distinctive traits of American humor become apparent: straightforwardness and a less strong taste for self-irony, we easily identify the British intellectuality and a certain restraint in jokes, and of course we are surprised by the black Russian humor and the deepest self-irony, which seems to flow in the blood of every Russian. Yes, we are convinced that every nation really has something to surprise us, it is enough just to make a joke and our interlocutor will inwardly agree that we are different in our unity. And this does not spoil the relationship between people, but on the contrary encourages people to think about the uniqueness of each country. Humor is a spoon of honey in a barrel of tar of our everyday life. (Pic. 6) Humor is one of the magical means by which real miracles are performed. «Laughter is the sun», as Victor Hugo said, [4, p.132] and how could one not agree with him? To bring people together? Defuse the situation? Save a desperate situation? Make jokes, laugh and smile, and the world will be much brighter, as will your faces, because humor helps you look at the troubles from a different angle, and much friendlier, because when you understand the humor of a country you understand its citizens. Maybe if everyone understood each other's humor, a joke thrown in among the serious faces of the representatives of different countries at a summit would have saved the world from enmity and would have solved the pressing political problems... Could humor be our salvation, personal and public? Could it be that something so unimportant at first glance is the very essence? We should all think about it. We will. Will you?

References:

1. Barsky L.A. Anatomy of English Humor. Anatomy of English Humor: English Jokes with Translation into Russian [Anatomiia angliyskogo yumora. Anatomiia angliyskogo yumora: Angliyskie shutki s perevodom na russkiy.]. Moscow: Krasand. 2010. [in Russian]
2. Belov N. Anecdotes [Anecdoty]. 2003. [in Russian]
3. Bloxham A. Daily Telegraph British humour 'dictated by genetics'. 10 Mar 2008.
4. Dishenko K. Big dictionary of quotations and winged expressions: 13300 quotations and winged expressions from literature, history, politics, science, religion, philosophy and popular culture . [Bolshoy slovar tsitat i krylatyh vyrazheniy] Moscow: Eksmo. 2011. 1215, [1] p. [in Russian]
5. Kohut A. America Against the World, Times Books. 2006. 288 p.
6. Korolkova, Lomov, & Tikhonov Dictionary of aphorisms of Russian writers [Slovar aforizmov russkih pisateley]. Moscow: Rus.yaz.-Media. 2004 (N. Novgorod : GIPP Nizhpoligraf). 627, [1] p.[in Russian]
7. Losev A.F., Taho-Godi A.A., Asmus V.F. Platon. Moscow: Mysl. 1[94. 654 p. [in Russian]
8. Sutton D. A chorus of raspberries: British film comedy 1929–1939. Exeter: University of Exeter Press. 2010.
9. The Library of Proverbial Wisdom - Sayings about Laughs URL: <https://proverbicals.com/laughs> (accessed 12.01.2022)
10. Upjoke - Joke for every topic. URL: <https://upjoke.com/american-jokes> (accessed 12.01.2022)

Appendixes:



Pic. 1. A picture where the whole audience is laughing, but one man obviously doesn't have the same sense of humor as they do



Pic. 2. Anecdote on the top of the humor genres



Pic. 3. A British gentleman with and without stage image



Pic. 4. A metaphor for America's love of prestige in everything - gold handcuffs



Pic. 5. Well-known Russian characters: Crocodile Gena and Cheburashka



Pic. 6. Illustration of the upside-down expression: a spoon of honey in a barrel of tar