

CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH PROVERBS INTO UZBEK

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Abstract: This article explores the multifaceted challenges during the process of translating English proverbs into Uzbek. These challenges mainly in linguistic, cultural, semantic, and stylistic dimensions, each of which demands careful consideration by translators. Proverbs, as crystallized forms of collective wisdom, embody cultural identity and metaphorical imagery that often resist straightforward transfer. The study analyzes cases where literal translation fails, where functional equivalents exist in the target language, and where explanatory translation becomes necessary. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from translation studies—including Nida's concept of equivalence, Newmark's semantic and communicative translation, and Venuti's localization strategies—the paper underscores the need for context-sensitive and culturally informed translation practices. Comparative examples of English and Uzbek proverbs illustrate the strategies available to translators and highlight the importance of preserving both meaning and aesthetic value. The findings suggest that effective proverb translation requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural sensitivity, interpretive flexibility, and literary awareness.

Keywords: proverb, aphorism, translation, metaphor, equivalence, cultural difference, domestication, localization.

Introduction

Proverbs are among the most enduring manifestations of human cognition and cultural identity. Functioning as condensed forms of wisdom, they encapsulate life philosophies, moral lessons, and social norms within short and memorable linguistic units. Because they are deeply rooted in culture, proverbs are of particular interest in translation studies, where the transfer of culturally embedded meanings is often problematic (Bassnett, 2014).

Translating English proverbs into Uzbek poses a unique set of challenges. While both languages share universal human values, differences in worldview, metaphorical imagery, and cultural references create significant barriers to equivalence. Literal translation often results in loss of idiomaticity, while functional substitution risks diluting metaphorical richness. This paper investigates these challenges and considers strategies to overcome them.

Literature Review

The translation of proverbs has long been studied within broader debates on equivalence and cultural transfer. Nida (1964) distinguished between formal and dynamic equivalence, emphasizing the importance of naturalness and receptor response in translation. Newmark (1988) differentiated between semantic and communicative translation, offering practical strategies for idiomatic expressions. Later scholars such as Baker (1992) and Bassnett (2014) highlighted the role of context, cultural specificity, and intertextuality in the translation of figurative language.

Venuti (1995) introduced the dichotomy of domestication and foreignization, which is particularly relevant for proverbs: should the translator adapt the text to the target culture, or preserve the foreign imagery? Vermeer's (1989) skopos theory further suggests that translation choices should be guided by purpose and audience expectations. These frameworks provide the theoretical basis for analyzing the challenges of proverb translation.

Main Discussion

1. Linguistic Challenges

English proverbs are frequently concise, elliptical, and rhythmically balanced, making them difficult to replicate in Uzbek without expansion. For example, "No pain, no gain" is only four words but carries philosophical depth. The Uzbek equivalent "Jon kuydirmasang, jonona qaytda" requires more words and a different syntactic structure.

Lexical polysemy also complicates translation. In "Time is money", the word money denotes not only material wealth but also opportunity and resources. Thus, translators may choose "Vaqt – boylik" (Time is wealth) or "Vaqt – bebaho ne'mat" (Time is a priceless gift), depending on context.

2. Cultural Challenges

Proverbs are inseparable from their cultural roots. Many English proverbs reflect agrarian traditions, historical events, or Christian moral codes. For instance, "The early bird catches the worm" originates from rural life and can be rendered in Uzbek as "Sahar turgan kishini Xudo o'nglar ishini".

However, some proverbs rely on imagery absent in Uzbek culture. "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" conveys the risks of over-dependence but may seem odd to an Uzbek audience. A culturally natural equivalent is "Bir daraxtga bog'ni suyama" (Do not rely on a single tree for your garden).

3. Semantic Challenges

Metaphorical imagery often resists direct transfer. "A rolling stone gathers no moss" suggests instability prevents accumulation, while Uzbek has a semantically similar proverb: "birlik bor yerda baraka bo'ladi". Yet the imagery of stone and moss carries little resonance in Uzbek, weakening metaphorical impact.

Similarly, “Knowledge is power” is usually translated as “Bilim – kuch”. However, the English power connotes not only strength but also political and social dominance, dimensions not fully conveyed in Uzbek.

4. Translation Strategies

Three strategies dominate proverb translation:

Literal translation often distorts meaning. For example, “Curiosity killed the cat” rendered literally as “Qiziqish mushukni o‘ldirdi” sounds unnatural.

Equivalent substitution is effective when culturally appropriate counterparts exist. For example, “The early bird catches the worm” → “Sahar turgan kishi xudo o‘glar ishini”.

Explanatory translation conveys meaning but sacrifices brevity. Thus, “Curiosity killed the cat” can be translated as “burnini har joyga suqqan boshsiz qoladi”.

These approaches align with Nida’s (1964) dynamic equivalence, Newmark’s (1988) communicative translation, and Venuti’s (1995) domestication versus foreignization.

5. Contextual and Stylistic Considerations

Proverbs function differently across contexts. In literature, they contribute to characterization and imagery, whereas in political speeches they enhance persuasion. Translators must therefore consider not only linguistic equivalence but also stylistic resonance. The translation of Shakespeare’s or Wilde’s aphorisms, for instance, requires literary sensitivity to preserve rhetorical elegance and cultural nuance.

6. Comparative Examples

“Actions speak louder than words” → “Ko‘p gap eshshakka yuk”. (High semantic equivalence).

“Every cloud has a silver lining” → “Har bir baloning bir yaxshiligi bor”. (Sense preserved, imagery simplified).

“Rome wasn’t built in a day” → “Qal’a bir kunda qurilmagan”. (Culturally adapted; retaining “Rome” may emphasize historical context).

Conclusion

Translating English proverbs and aphorisms into Uzbek is a multidimensional task requiring mastery of both linguistic and cultural systems. Literal renderings are rarely adequate; instead, translators must balance fidelity to meaning with sensitivity to cultural imagery and aesthetic form.

The study demonstrates that successful proverb translation depends on three key factors: (1) awareness of linguistic conciseness and polysemy, (2) recognition of cultural specificity and metaphorical imagery, and (3) stylistic flexibility to suit context and purpose. Ultimately, proverb translation is not only a linguistic exercise but also a form of cultural negotiation, enriching intercultural dialogue and advancing translation theory in practice.

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