

**ISSUES OF EQUIVALENCE AND NON-EQUIVALENCE IN JAPANESE FOLK
PROVERBS IN “いろはかるた” (Iroha Karuta)**

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Abstract: This article explores the issues surrounding the translation of Japanese folk proverbs, specifically those found in “いろはかるた” (Iroha Karuta), into the Uzbek language. The study examines problems of equivalence and non-equivalence in the process of translating these culturally rich expressions. Proverbs are analyzed with respect to how closely their meanings, structures, and cultural implications align with their Uzbek counterparts.

Keywords: translation, proverb, equivalence, non-equivalence, correspondence

Introduction

One of the main challenges in the field of translation is the issue of equivalence and non-equivalence. This becomes particularly evident when translating Japanese folk proverbs into Uzbek. As noted by many linguists, translating phraseological units is often not straightforward. These units typically carry emotional, expressive meanings and are deeply rooted in national culture.

いろはかるた (Iroha Karuta) is a traditional Japanese card game containing proverbs (ことわざ kotowaza) that reflect moral values, cultural norms, and everyday wisdom. These proverbs often have no direct equivalents in other languages due to cultural specificity, metaphorical differences, and socio-historical context.

It is important to recognize that both Japanese and Uzbek proverbs reflect the values, traditions, and worldview of their respective peoples, from historical to modern times. Proverbs serve as essential representatives of oral folklore and act as cultural bearers.

Occurs when a proverb in Japanese has a direct or near-direct equivalent in meaning and function in another language. Similar metaphorical structure or shared cultural concept.

Occurs when there is no direct counterpart in the target language.

The proverb is based on culture-specific references, historical customs, or Japanese worldview. Literal translation causes loss of meaning, imagery, or pragmatic function.

Complete equivalence same meaning and metaphor 「犬も歩けば棒に当たる」 “Every dog has its day” / “Fortune favors the bold”.

Partial equivalence similar meaning but different imagery 「花より団子」 “Substance over show” (literally: Dumplings over flowers).

Functional equivalence different words, same social function 「百聞は一見にしかず」 “Seeing is believing”.

Cultural-specific concepts based on Japanese customs, festivals, nature 「泣く子と地頭には勝てぬ」 (One cannot win against a crying child or a local magistrate).

Untranslatable wordplay puns and phonetic patterns 「虻蜂取らず」(To catch neither the horsefly nor the bee) Idiomatic loss if translated literally,
Metaphorical non-equivalence uses imagery unfamiliar to target culture 「論より証拠」(Proof is stronger than argument) Equivalent exists but metaphor differs
Conceptual absence reflects Japanese values like group harmony (和) 「出る杭は打たれる」(The nail that sticks out gets hammered down) Western cultures value individuality → conceptual contrast

1. Cultural Context (seasonal customs, social hierarchy, Buddhism/Shinto references)
2. Lexical Gaps (no corresponding word or concept)
3. Worldview Differences (collectivism vs. individualism)
4. Metaphorical Frameworks (nature, animals, religion differ by region)

Strategies for Translating Proverbs

Strategy When Used Example

Literal Translation When metaphor is universal 百聞は一見にしかず → "Hearing something 100 times isn't as good as seeing it once"

Cultural adaptation to convey equivalent effect 花より団子 → "Function over form"

Paraphrasing When no proverb exists 出る杭は打たれる → "People who stand out are often criticized"

Literature Review and Methodology

This research draws upon foundational translation theories and cultural linguistics. Works such as "Tarjima nazariyasi" (Translation Theory) by G'afurov et al., and "Lingvokulturologiya" by I. Darvishov provide insights into the difficulties of rendering culturally loaded expressions across languages.¹ Comparative analysis is the primary method used in evaluating Japanese and Uzbek proverb pairs.

Results

Let us analyze specific examples of Japanese proverbs from Iroha Karuta and their corresponding Uzbek translations:

犬も歩けば棒に当たる (Inu mo arukeba bō ni ataru)

Literally: "Even a dog will run into a stick if it walks."

Uzbek equivalent: Yurgan sayoq – yeydi tayoq ("A wandering vagrant gets beaten").

This translation preserves the semantic core and expressive tone.

楽あれば苦あり (Raku areba ku ari)

Literal translation: "Where there is pleasure, there is also hardship."

Uzbek equivalent: Oyning o'n beshi qorong'u, o'n beshi yorug' ("Half the moon is dark, half is bright").

This translation captures the meaning of alternating fortune.

かわいい子には旅をさせよ (Kawaii ko ni wa tabi o saseyo)

Literal: "Let a beloved child experience travel."

¹ I.G'afurov, O.Mo'minov, N.Qambarov. Tarjima nazariyasi.-Toshkent: 2012.-163 b.

Uzbek equivalent: Bola aziz – tarbiyasi undan aziz ("A child is dear, but their upbringing is dearer").

The Uzbek proverb reflects the same pedagogical value.

塵も積もれば山となる (Chiri mo tsumoreba yama to naru)

Literal: "Even dust, when piled up, becomes a mountain."

Uzbek equivalent: Toma-toma ko'l bo'lur ("Drop by drop, a lake is formed").

Both proverbs highlight the value of persistence and accumulation.

学ぶこと生きること、生きること学ぶこと (Manabu koto ikiru koto, ikiru koto manabu koto)²

Translation: "To learn is to live; to live is to learn."

Uzbek equivalent: Beshikdan to qabrgacha ilm izla ("Seek knowledge from cradle to grave").

Though structurally different, the idea of lifelong learning is maintained.

念には念を入れよ (Nen ni wa nen o ireyo)

Translation: "Put care into your care."

Uzbek equivalent: Ehtiyoting bo'lsa, ehtiyojing bo'lmas ³("If you're careful, you'll lack nothing").

This pair is a close semantic match.



Discussion

From the examples above, we observe two key translation approaches:

1. Semantic equivalence, where the meaning is preserved though the form may change.
2. Formal equivalence, where the form (structure, metaphors) is also retained.

² <https://fudawiki.org/en/iroha> 2025-y. 04.04 <http://japancards.ru/karuty/iroha-karuta/>

³ Achilova O. F. Yaponcha-O'zbekcha imperativ maqollar to'plami. –Samarqand: 2024. –54 b.

Often, Japanese proverbs require culturally adapted translations to fit the Uzbek worldview, especially when the literal meaning may confuse or mislead the target audience.

As stated in the field of cultural linguistics: “Sometimes, a single linguistic-cultural unit can be deeply embedded in the structure of myths, proverbs, and idioms.” For instance, while the wolf symbolizes a threat in many cultures, in Turkic traditions it symbolizes freedom and independence.⁴

Conclusion

The analysis shows that Japanese and Uzbek proverbs, while rooted in distinct cultural frameworks, often share universal themes such as morality, perseverance, and education. However, not all proverbs have direct equivalents, and some require functional or cultural adaptation during translation.

Understanding the deeper cultural and semantic layers of proverbs is vital for accurate and meaningful translation. This research reaffirms that proverbs are not only linguistic elements but cultural heritage, shaping and reflecting the mentality of a people.

The challenge lies in finding the balance between literal meaning and cultural relevance, which can only be achieved through deep linguistic and cultural awareness.

The study of equivalence and non-equivalence in Iroha Karuta proverbs reveals profound insights into Japanese culture, social norms, and linguistic worldview. While some proverbs share universal themes like luck, effort, or wisdom, others are deeply embedded in Japanese history and cannot be directly translated without cultural interpretation.

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⁴ Darvishov Ibrohim O'rmonovich; “Lingvokulturologiya”.-Namangan: 2021.- 21 b.

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