

CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS: A CASE STUDY OF UZBEK PROVERBS INTO ENGLISH

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Annotation. This paper investigates the challenges encountered when translating culture-specific items, particularly Uzbek proverbs, into English. It analyzes the linguistic, cultural, and semantic obstacles that arise during translation processes and examines various translation strategies including literal translation, cultural equivalence, and explanatory translation. The research employs a comparative analysis of selected Uzbek proverbs and their English counterparts to identify patterns of cultural divergence and convergence.

Аннотация. В данной статье исследуются проблемы, возникающие при переводе культурно-специфических элементов, в частности узбекских пословиц, на английский язык. В ней анализируются лингвистические, культурные и семантические препятствия, возникающие в процессе перевода, и рассматриваются различные стратегии перевода, включая дословный перевод, культурный эквивалент и пояснительный перевод.

Keywords: translation challenges, culture-specific items, Uzbek proverbs, English equivalents, translation strategies, cultural context, semantic obstacles, metaphorical systems, comparative analysis, cross-cultural communication.

Ключевые слова: трудности перевода, культурно-специфические элементы, узбекские пословицы, английские эквиваленты, стратегии перевода, культурный контекст, семантические препятствия, метафорические системы, сравнительный анализ, межкультурная коммуникация.

Translation of culture-specific items, particularly proverbs, presents unique challenges due to their deep cultural embeddedness and complex linguistic structures. This study focuses on Uzbek proverbs, which function not merely as linguistic expressions but as repositories of cultural wisdom, historical experiences, and social values of the Uzbek people. When attempting to translate these proverbs into English, translators encounter multiple barriers that extend beyond simple linguistic conversion, requiring sophisticated navigation of two distinct cultural and conceptual frameworks.

Proverbs represent condensed cultural wisdom that has evolved over centuries, encapsulating a society's worldview, values, and social norms. Uzbek proverbs, with their rich heritage rooted in Central Asian cultural traditions, Islamic influences, and nomadic history, contain references to cultural practices, historical events, and societal structures that may have no direct equivalent in English-speaking cultures. For instance, the Uzbek proverb "Bir qo'l bilan tugun bog'lanmas" (literally: "A knot cannot be tied with one hand") carries cultural implications about the value of cooperation and community support in traditional Uzbek society. While the literal meaning might be comprehensible to English speakers, the full cultural resonance and contextual usage would likely be lost without additional explanation [1;32].

The translation of proverbs necessitates consideration of several interconnected linguistic and cultural factors. First, the syntactic and grammatical structures of Uzbek and English differ significantly. Uzbek, as an agglutinative Turkic language, employs morphological features and word order patterns distinct from English. Second, lexical items in proverbs often have specific cultural connotations that extend beyond their denotative meanings. Third, proverbs frequently employ figurative language, including metaphors, similes, and personification, which may not translate effectively across cultural boundaries. Finally, the rhythmic and phonological features of proverbs—including rhyme, alliteration, and assonance—contribute to their memorability and impact but are challenging to preserve in translation. In addressing these challenges, translators typically employ several strategies. Literal translation preserves the original linguistic structure but often fails to convey cultural nuances. Cultural equivalence seeks an analogous proverb in the target language that expresses a similar meaning, though this approach may sacrifice the specific cultural elements of the source proverb. Explanatory translation incorporates additional information to clarify cultural references but may compromise the conciseness characteristic of proverbs. Finally, creative adaptation reimagines the proverb while attempting to maintain its essential meaning and impact.

To illustrate these strategies, consider the following examples:

The Uzbek proverb "Mehnat – mehnatning tagi rohat" (literally: "After labor comes pleasure") expresses the value of hard work leading to enjoyment or satisfaction. A cultural equivalent in English might be "No pain, no gain" or "Hard work pays off." While these translations capture the core meaning, they lack the specific cultural context of labor in Uzbek agricultural society.

"Yolg'iz otning changi chiqmas, changi chiqsa ham dong'i chiqmas" (literally: "A lone horse raises no dust, and even if it raises dust, it makes no fame") emphasizes the importance of collective effort for significant achievement. This could be translated through explanation as "A person working alone cannot achieve fame or notable success, as significant achievements require collective effort"—a translation that preserves meaning but loses the proverbial quality.

"Bilagi zo'r birni yiqar, bilimi zo'r mingni yiqar" (literally: "The strong-armed defeats one, the knowledgeable defeats a thousand") values knowledge over physical strength. An English functional equivalent might be "The pen is mightier than the sword," though this translation shifts the specific comparison while maintaining the general concept [2;76].

Theoretical frameworks for analyzing these translation challenges include Eugene Nida's concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence, Mona Baker's non-equivalence at word level, and Lawrence Venuti's notions of domestication and foreignization. These frameworks help categorize the translation strategies employed and evaluate their effectiveness in preserving both semantic content and cultural significance.

A comparative analysis of 50 commonly used Uzbek proverbs and their English translations reveals several patterns. First, proverbs related to universal human experiences (such as those concerning honesty, friendship, or hard work) tend to have closer equivalents in English than those referencing specific cultural practices or historical contexts. Second, proverbs containing references to agricultural practices, traditional crafts, or Islamic religious concepts present particular translation difficulties. Third, metaphorical expressions based on culturally specific imagery (such as references to traditional Uzbek foods, clothing, or social structures) often require substantial adaptation or explanation to be comprehensible to English speakers [3;87].

The most successful translations tend to balance semantic accuracy with cultural transposition, finding points of connection between the two cultural systems without entirely erasing the distinctive features of the source culture. For example, the Uzbek proverb "Oltin o'tda bilinar, odam – mehnatda" (literally: "Gold is tested in fire, a person in labor") can be effectively rendered as "Gold is tested by fire, a person by hardship," maintaining both the structural parallelism and the essential meaning while adapting the specific reference to "mehnat" (labor) to the more general concept of "hardship" that resonates with English speakers. In educational contexts, these translation challenges present important pedagogical implications. Language learners benefit from explicit instruction in not only the linguistic features of proverbs but also their cultural backgrounds and contexts of use. Contrastive analysis of proverbs across cultures can enhance cross-cultural communication skills and develop critical awareness of cultural differences and similarities. Furthermore, the process of translating culturally embedded expressions like proverbs can serve as a valuable exercise in developing both linguistic competence and cultural intelligence.

Digital technologies offer new opportunities for addressing translation challenges. Corpus-based approaches allow for systematic analysis of how proverbs are used in authentic contexts, while multimedia platforms can provide cultural background information that enriches understanding beyond the text itself. However, these technological approaches should complement rather than replace human translators' cultural knowledge and judgment.

In conclusion, the translation of Uzbek proverbs into English reveals the complex interplay between language and culture. Successful translation requires not merely linguistic conversion but cultural mediation—a process that demands deep understanding of both source and target cultures and sophisticated decision-making about which elements to preserve, adapt, or explain. As intercultural communication continues to grow in importance in our globalized world, the ability to navigate these translation challenges becomes increasingly valuable, both for professional translators and for language learners. Future research in this area might explore how translation strategies vary across different types of proverbs, how new technologies can support the translation of culture-specific items, and how translated proverbs are received and understood by speakers of the target language. Such research would further illuminate the complex processes involved in cross-cultural communication and deepen our understanding of how cultural wisdom can be shared across linguistic boundaries.

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