



Problems In Translating English And Uzbek Proverbs

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Abstract: Proverbs are concise, culturally loaded expressions reflecting a people's worldview, mentality, traditions and values. Translating proverbs from one language to another—in this case between English and Uzbek—poses significant challenges. This article examines the major difficulties in translating proverbs between English and Uzbek, including issues of equivalence, cultural context, metaphor and symbolism, and linguistic-structural differences. It also reviews translation strategies and offers illustrative examples. Finally, implications for translators and educators are considered.

Keywords: Illustrative examples, implications, translators and educators, proverbs.

Introduction: Proverbs, as fixed expressions of collective wisdom, embed cultural values, beliefs, historical experience and mental attitudes. When translating proverbs between languages such as English and Uzbek, one cannot simply translate the words; the cultural meaning and connotation must be preserved. However, this is rarely straightforward. The cultural gap, metaphorical nature, lexical peculiarities and structural characteristics of proverbs make translation “problem-rich”. For example, while an English proverb like “A stitch in time saves nine” communicates a notion of timely action preventing greater trouble, the underlying imagery (stitch, nine) may be foreign to Uzbek speakers, and a literal rendering may confuse rather than clarify. Studies show that proverbs often resist direct translation due to cultural specificity and metaphorical encoding (Boykhanov, 2022).

This article explores the major categories of problems encountered when translating English and Uzbek proverbs, presents examples and discusses possible strategies. Key sources include recent research into English-Uzbek proverb translation (e.g., Kholboyeva,

2025; Chorlieva, 2023).

Proverbs are defined as “short, generally known sentences of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views” (Mieder, 1985, as cited in Boykhanov, 2022). They are typically metaphorical, fixed in form, transmitted orally and anchored in cultural context.

Importance of translation equivalence

In translation studies, equivalence refers to the degree to which a translation in the target language replicates the same meaning, effect and cultural function as the source text. For proverbs, equivalence is difficult because one deals with deeply cultural, metaphorical, lexical and pragmatic aspects (Boykhanov, 2022).

Why English ↔ Uzbek proverbs are particularly challenging

English and Uzbek languages reflect different cultural, historical, socio-psychological backgrounds. Proverbs in each language encode values, mental attitudes and imagery specific to their culture. Therefore, translating between them involves not only linguistic conversion but cultural mediation. Research shows multiple kinds of difficulties: lexical gaps, culture-specific references, metaphorical meaning, structural difference and pragmatics (e.g., Chorlieva, 2023; Kholboyeva, 2025).

Cultural and Contextual Problems

Proverbs often rely on cultural knowledge, shared history, social norms and worldview. When this background is missing, literal translation may yield a meaningless or odd phrase.

- Example: An English proverb referencing “stitch”, “nine” (as above) may lose meaning when translated literally into Uzbek culture where the metaphorical associations differ.
- Research: The article Translation Problems in Cultural References from English to Uzbek finds that cultural references present unique obstacles in translating proverbs/idioms because of socio-cultural gaps.

Metaphorical and Symbolic Problems

Proverbs typically use imagery (animals, objects, numbers, colours) which carry metaphorical weight in one culture but may not in another.

- For example, animal imagery differs: an animal considered cunning in one culture may not carry that connotation in the target culture.
- The structural-semantic analysis of English and Russian proverbs found that metaphorical imagery reflects national mentalities (Orlova & Nikulina).
- The lexical/semantic analysis of English and

Uzbek proverbs with zoonym (animal) components shows how mental features are revealed via metaphorical animal imagery.

Lexical and Equivalence Problems

Because proverbs are fixed and often archaic, translators face lexical gaps—words or concepts with no direct counterpart in the target language.

- Article Lexical Problems in Translation Between English Language and Uzbek Language documents issues such as false friends, polysemy, idiomatic meaning and cultural specificity.
- Some proverbs simply have no equivalent structure or phrase in the target language; adequacy is problematic. For example, Salohiddinova & Xayrullayeva (2023) discuss “adequacy problems” in English-Uzbek proverb translation.

Structural and Stylistic Problems

Proverbs tend to have fixed structure (rhyme, parallelism, succinctness). Maintaining that in translation can be challenging.

- Literal translation may preserve structure but lose meaning; free translation may preserve meaning but lose form and stylistic effect. Boykhanov (2022) shows that in translating English proverbs into Uzbek one out of nine could not be translated word-for-word.

Pragmatic and Usage Problems

Even if meaning is preserved, the proverb may not function in the same pragmatic way in the target culture—its usage may differ.

- For example, a proverb used in English for self-reliance may not have same resonance in Uzbek culture which emphasises communal interdependence.
- The study “Challenges in Translating Uzbek Vocabulary and Idiomatic Expressions” highlights how idiomatic expressions embody cultural nuance which may be lost in translation.

Illustrative Examples of English ↔ Uzbek Proverbs

Example 1: Literal vs. Adapted Translation

English: “A stitch in time saves nine.”

Literal Uzbek: “Bir vaqtida tikilgan tikuv to‘qqizni saqlaydi.” (unidiomatic)

Adapted: Perhaps use a culturally equivalent Uzbek proverb about timely action.

Example 2: Animal imagery

English: “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.” (one who complains gets attention)

Literal Uzbek: “Girg’irlik tugagan g’ildirak yog’ oladi.” (makes little sense)

Better adaptation: Use an Uzbek proverb with similar

pragmatic force if available.

Example 3: Heart metaphor

Article Translation Problems of Proverbs with the Concept HEART in English and Uzbek Languages shows how proverbs containing “heart” cause difficulties due to metaphorical usage in respective cultures.

Example 4: Number symbolism

English: “Third time lucky.”

In Uzbek culture a different number may carry significance; a literal translation may confuse.

Translation Strategies & Solutions

Finding an Equivalent Proverb

If the target culture has a proverb with same meaning even if different form, use that as a functional equivalent rather than literal translation.

Adaptation and Explanation

Translator may adapt the proverb—modify the metaphorical image to fit target culture, or provide a brief gloss/explanation.

Literal + Free Hybrid

Combine literal translation and free paraphrase to preserve imagery and meaning, though readability may suffer.

Footnote or Commentary

In academic or literary translation, keep the original proverb and add footnote explaining cultural context.

Avoid Over-Literal Translation

As Boykhanov (2022) states: “One out of nine proverbs could not be translated word-for-word.” Translators must prioritize sense over form.

Implications for Translators, Educators and Researchers

For Translators

Understanding the cultural, metaphorical, lexical, structural and pragmatic dimensions of proverbs is essential. Translators should be aware that preserving form may damage meaning, and vice versa.

For Language Educators

Teaching proverbs in a foreign language context (e.g., English learners in Uzbekistan) helps learners appreciate cultural mentality. Teachers should highlight how proverbs reflect values and how translation choices affect meaning.

For Researchers

Comparative proverb translation between English and Uzbek is a rich field: revealing mentalities, cultural change, translation theories. More empirical studies (e.g., Kholboyeva, 2025; Chorjeva, 2023) show value.

Limitations and Considerations

While analyzing translation problems provides insight, certain caveats apply:

- Proverbs are often archived cultural items—they may not reflect contemporary language usage fully.
- Equivalence may not always be achievable; translators must make choices and trade-offs.
- Context matters: a proverb used in conversation may not appear in translation the same way.

CONCLUSION

Translating proverbs between English and Uzbek is complex due to cultural, lexical, metaphorical, structural and pragmatic challenges. No single translation strategy covers all cases. Translators must balance preserving meaning, cultural nuance and readability. For educators and researchers, understanding these problems enhances cross-cultural competence and translation theory. By paying careful attention to proverb translation, we gain insight not only into language but into mentality, culture and communication.

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