BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg
BG PULSE JOURNAL

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR CULTURE-SPECIFIC PROVERBS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

Inatova Raykhon, Master's student at UZSWLU
Scientific supervisor: **Bayjanova Okila Iskandarovna**
PhD. Associate Professor at UZSWLU

Abstract

This paper focuses on translation strategies for culture-specific proverbs in Uzbek and English from linguistic and translation-studies perspectives. Proverbs are compact, conventional expressions that encode communal knowledge, moral judgment, and culturally specific imagery, which makes their translation especially difficult when literal meaning, figurative structure, and pragmatic force do not align across languages. The study uses a qualitative comparative method and analyzes selected Uzbek and English proverbs only. The analysis groups the material into full or near equivalence, partial equivalence, descriptive rendering, and cultural substitution. The findings show that direct equivalence is relatively rare for culture-specific proverbs, while functional equivalence, descriptive translation, and selective domestication or foreignization are more productive in preserving meaning and communicative effect. The article argues that proverb translation should be evaluated not only by lexical accuracy but also by semantic adequacy, cultural resonance, and pragmatic impact.

Keywords: *proverb translation, culture-specific proverb, Uzbek, English, equivalence, domestication, foreignization, comparative linguistics*

Introduction

Proverbs are a major part of figurative language and cultural memory. They condense social experience into fixed or semi-fixed forms and often circulate as concise statements of advice, warning, evaluation, or communal wisdom. Reference works on proverbs describe them as an important record of folk wisdom and a meaningful object of linguistic and cultural study (Mieder, 2004; Speake, 2015), while semantic studies emphasize that proverbs operate through figurative meaning rather than surface wording alone (Norrick, 1985). This makes proverb translation more demanding than ordinary lexical transfer.

Literature review

Translation has long treated equivalence, cultural transfer, and pragmatic effect as central issues, and these issues become sharper when the source text contains fixed expressions whose force depends on shared background knowledge. Baker and Jones frame translation difficulties across lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic levels; Newmark discusses procedures for culture-bound expressions; Bassnett treats translation as intercultural mediation; and Venuti shows how domestication and foreignization shape the visibility of cultural difference in translation (Baker & Jones, 2025; Newmark, 1988; Bassnett, 2014; Venuti, 2018). In Uzbek and English, proverb systems overlap in many universal themes such as work, patience, friendship, time, and morality, but they often differ in imagery, values foregrounded, and discourse conventions. Uzbek proverbs frequently rely on hospitality, collective ethics, and agrarian or domestic imagery, while English proverbs often favor compact generalizations, commercial or practical metaphors, and individual agency. Because of this, a proverb may be semantically similar across the two languages but still require a different translation strategy to preserve its communicative value. This article asks which strategies work best when translating culture-specific proverbs between Uzbek and English and

how those strategies can be justified linguistically. The study focuses only on Uzbek and English examples. The theoretical orientation follows major translation-studies frameworks on non-equivalence, cultural transfer, and proverb semantics (Baker & Jones, 2025; Newmark, 1988; Norrick, 1985; Venuti, 2018).

Methods

The study uses a qualitative comparative-analytical method. The material consists of selected Uzbek and English proverbs chosen for strong cultural content, recurrent use, and relevance to common semantic domains such as work, patience, social behavior, hospitality, and communal responsibility. The units were not treated as isolated words but as proverb-level constructions whose meaning emerges through figurative, pragmatic, and cultural use, which is consistent with semantic proverb research and translation theory (Norrick, 1985; Baker & Jones, 2025). The analysis was carried out in three stages. First, each proverb was examined for literal meaning, figurative meaning, and cultural implication. Second, a plausible counterpart or translation into the other language was identified. Third, the rendering was evaluated according to four criteria: semantic adequacy, pragmatic effect, cultural preservation, and naturalness in the target language. On that basis, the examples were classified into four strategy-based groups: full or near equivalence, partial equivalence, descriptive translation, and cultural substitution. The interpretive framework also drew on domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 2018), especially where preserving source-culture imagery conflicted with readability.

Results

Table 1. Uzbek and English proverbs with full or near equivalence

Uzbek proverb	English translation	Translation strategy	Brief explanation
Do‘st boshga kulfat tushganda bilinadi.	A friend in need is a friend indeed.	Full or near equivalence	Both proverbs express the same pragmatic lesson about true friendship under hardship.
Harakatda barakat.	Where there is effort, there is reward.	Functional near equivalence	The wording differs, but both connect action with positive outcome.
Vaqt oltindan qimmat.	Time is money.	Functional equivalence	Both value time highly, though the English version foregrounds economic pragmatism more strongly.

It is obvious that proverb translation is most straightforward when the two languages share both a general moral and a conventionalized target-language expression. Even here, however, exact

equivalence is not always lexical. *"Vaqt oltindan qimmat" and "Time is money"* communicate comparable value judgments, but their imagery is not identical: the Uzbek proverb uses direct value comparison, while the English proverb frames time through economic exchange. This supports the view that proverb translation often works at the level of function and communicative effect rather than verbal sameness (Baker & Jones, 2025; Norrick, 1985).

Table 2. Proverbs requiring partial equivalence, description, or cultural substitution

Uzbek proverb	Literal translation	Recommended English rendering	Translation strategy	Brief explanation
Mehmon otangdan ulug‘.	A guest is greater than your father.	A guest must be treated with the highest respect.	Descriptive translation	The Uzbek proverb reflects hospitality norms that are not idiomatically matched by an English proverb.
Bir bolaga yetti mahalla ota-ona.	Seven mahallas are parents to one child.	A child is raised by the whole community.	Cultural substitution + description	“Mahalla” is culture-specific and needs functional rendering.
Sabr tagi sariq oltin.	The end of patience is yellow gold.	Patience brings reward / Patience is a virtue.	Partial equivalence	The English options preserve the lesson but reduce the source image.
Qarg‘a qarg‘aning ko‘zini cho‘qimaydi.	A crow does not peck another crow’s eye.	Dog does not eat dog.	Cultural substitution	The moral is similar, but the animal image is replaced by a natural English proverb.
Kattaga hurmat, kichikka izzat.	Respect to the elder, regard to the younger.	Respect elders and care for the young.	Functional-descriptive translation	The ethical message is preserved, but the rhythmic proverb form becomes weaker.

It is clear that culture-specific proverbs rarely permit direct translation without loss. Some source images are too culturally dense to survive literal transfer, as with mahalla, hospitality formulas, or moral slogans that rely on compact parallelism. In such cases, descriptive translation and cultural substitution become more effective than literalism (Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 2018). The trade-off is clear: the closer the translation stays to source imagery, the more cultural texture it keeps, but the more it risks sounding opaque or non-idiomatic in the target language.

Discussion

The analysis suggests that proverb translation between Uzbek and English is shaped by three interacting factors: semantic overlap, cultural specificity, and target-language conventionality. When a target-language proverb already exists with close semantic and pragmatic value, equivalence is efficient and stylistically strong. When such a proverb does not exist, the translator must decide whether to preserve the source image or preserve the communicative function. This is where Newmark's procedures for culture-bound expressions and Baker and Jones's treatment of non-equivalence become especially useful (Newmark, 1988; Baker & Jones, 2025).

A first major pattern is that universal themes do not guarantee universal forms. Friendship, patience, and diligence are common human concerns, but each language packages them through different images and discourse habits. Norrick's semantic view of proverbs helps explain why literal wording is often secondary (Norrick, 1985): what matters is the social meaning a proverb activates in use. Therefore, a formally close translation may still fail pragmatically if the target reader does not recognize it as proverb-like or culturally coherent.

A second pattern is that strongly culture-bound elements often require controlled domestication or mixed strategies. In Uzbek, proverbs about hospitality, collective upbringing, or community ethics may depend on concepts that have no ready-made English equivalent. Here, descriptive translation is often more accurate than forcing a misleading English proverb. Yet Venuti's framework also warns against over-domestication (Venuti, 2018): if every local image is replaced by a familiar English one, the target text becomes smoother but loses Uzbek cultural specificity. For that reason, items like mahalla sometimes justify partial retention or explicit explanation, especially in literary or academic contexts where source-culture visibility matters.

A third pattern concerns stylistic loss. Proverbs are valued not only for meaning but also for brevity, balance, rhythm, and memorability. Descriptive translation often preserves content while weakening proverbial force. Cultural substitution does the opposite: it restores idiomatic force in the target language but may change imagery and cultural nuance. The translator's choice, then, depends on purpose. In literary translation, preserving source colouring may be preferable. In pedagogical, journalistic, or pragmatic communication, functional equivalence may be the better option. Bassnett's understanding of translation as mediation supports this flexible, purpose-sensitive approach (Bassnett, 2014).

Conclusion

The study shows that culture-specific proverb translation between Uzbek and English cannot be reduced to word-for-word equivalence. Proverbs are culturally saturated units whose meaning depends on figurative structure, social use, and shared background knowledge. As a result, full equivalence is possible only in a limited number of cases, usually where both languages already have a conventional proverb with similar semantic and pragmatic force. For most culture-specific proverbs, the most productive strategies are partial equivalence, descriptive translation, and selective cultural substitution. Literal translation may preserve imagery but often fails idiomatically; descriptive translation preserves meaning but can weaken stylistic force; substitution can restore proverb-like naturalness but reduce source-culture texture. The best choice depends on context,

genre, and translation purpose. Overall, the article argues that proverb translation should aim for a balanced solution that respects semantic meaning, pragmatic function, and cultural visibility.

References

1. Baker, M., & Jones, H. (2025). In other words: A coursebook on translation (4th ed.). Routledge.
2. Bassnett, S. (2014). Translation studies (4th ed.). Routledge.
3. Mieder, W. (2004). Proverbs: A handbook. Greenwood Press.
4. Newmark, P. (1988). A textbook of translation. Prentice-Hall International.
5. Norrick, N. R. (1985). How proverbs mean: Semantic studies in English proverbs. Mouton.
6. Speake, J. (Ed.). (2015). The Oxford dictionary of proverbs (6th ed.). Oxford University Press.
7. Venuti, L. (2018). The translator's invisibility: A history of translation. Routledge.