

**TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF ENGLISH PROVERBS INTO UZBEK: A  
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract**

Proverbs condense cultural experience into short, fixed forms, and their translation rarely allows simple word replacement. This article examines how 30 English proverbs of general moral and everyday content are rendered into Uzbek. The proverbs were taken from the Little Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (Knowles, 2016) and compared with two printed Uzbek collections (Mirzayev et al., 2005; Karamatova & Karamatov, 2000). Each case was classified as full equivalence, partial equivalence, literal translation or descriptive translation, using criteria adapted from Baker (2011) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995). Partial equivalence was the most frequent strategy (36.7%), followed by descriptive translation (26.7%), full equivalence (23.3%) and literal translation (13.3%). An Uzbek proverb counterpart was found for 18 of the 30 items (60.0%), but only seven of them kept the original image. The analysis shows that images tied to English everyday realia tend to be replaced or explained, while images drawn from universal domestic and natural experience travel directly. The findings may help translation students choose suitable strategies for proverbs.

**Keywords:** Proverb, translation strategy, equivalence, paraphrase, English, Uzbek.

**Introduction**

**Annotatsiya**

Maqolada 30 ta ingliz maqolining o'zbek tiliga tarjima strategiyalari tahlil qilingan. Maqollar Knowles lug'atidan tanlanib, ikki o'zbek maqollar to'plami bilan solishtirilgan va to'rt toifaga ajratilgan: to'liq ekvivalent, qisman ekvivalent, so'zma-so'z tarjima va tavsifiy tarjima. Eng ko'p uchragan strategiya qisman ekvivalent (36,7%) bo'ldi. Natijalar ingliz kundalik hayotiga xos obrazlar o'zbek tilida almashtirilishi yoki izohlanishini ko'rsatadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** maqol, tarjima strategiyasi, ekvivalentlik, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili

**Аннотация**

В статье анализируются стратегии перевода 30 английских пословиц на узбекский язык. Пословицы отобраны из словаря Knowles и сопоставлены с двумя узбекскими сборниками; примеры классифицированы как полный эквивалент, частичный эквивалент, буквальный перевод и описательный перевод. Наиболее частой оказалась стратегия частичной эквивалентности (36,7%). Результаты показывают, что образы, связанные с английскими реалиями, в узбекском языке заменяются или поясняются.

**Ключевые слова:** пословица, стратегия перевода, эквивалентность, английский язык, узбекский язык

## 1. Introduction

A proverb is a short, traditional saying that presents a lesson or observation in a memorable and usually figurative form (Mieder, 2004, p. 3). Because proverbs grow out of a community's history, work, food, animals and social life, they are among the most culture-bound units of a language. This is what makes them a persistent problem in translation. A word-for-word rendering may sound unnatural or may hide the point, while an explanation removes the brevity, rhythm and imagery that make a proverb recognisable. Baker (2011, p. 67) notes that fixed expressions and proverbs behave much like idioms, since they allow little or no variation in form. She also stresses that choosing an idiom of the same kind in the target language is not always the ideal solution, because style, register and rhetorical effect must be considered as well (Baker, 2011, p. 76).

The translation of English proverbs into Uzbek has already been addressed in several studies. Boykhanov (2022) translated nine English proverbs into Uzbek to test the view that proverbs cannot be translated, and found that eight could be rendered successfully while one could not be translated word for word; he concludes that translatability depends on whether the same notions exist in both languages. Khidirova and Eshdavlatova (2021) analysed proverbs containing the word "money", discussing translation methods and semantic features, and showed that some of them can be translated directly while others differ considerably from their Uzbek versions. Ibragimova (2024) examined the translation of health-related proverbs in Karamatova and Karamatov's trilingual collection, paying particular attention to national and cultural aspects. These studies work with a very small sample or with a single theme (nine proverbs, money, health). The present article instead takes 30 proverbs of general moral and everyday content, classifies each Uzbek rendering by strategy, and relates the strategy to the kind of image the proverb carries.

English and Uzbek belong to different language families and rest on different cultural traditions. English proverbs often use images such as chickens, tar, skittles or buttered bread, which belong to English rural and urban life. Uzbek proverbs draw on riders and fords, dumplings, cream, cattle and the courtyard. As a result, some English proverbs have close Uzbek counterparts, some have counterparts that express the same idea through a different image, and some have no counterpart at all.

The aim of this article is to describe the strategies by which 30 English proverbs can be rendered into Uzbek and to relate each strategy to the kind of image or message the proverb carries. The study addresses three questions:

1. Which translation strategies are used for English proverbs in Uzbek?
2. Which strategy is the most frequent in the sample?
3. What kinds of proverbs are associated with each strategy?

The article follows the IMRAD structure: the introduction and theoretical background are followed by methods, results and discussion.

### **1.1. Theoretical background**

Newmark (1988, pp. 46–47) distinguishes semantic translation, which follows the author's linguistic level and thought, and communicative translation, which aims to be readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. He regards literal translation as the basic translation procedure, but notes that above the word level it becomes increasingly difficult and is correct only when the source and target meanings correspond in referent and pragmatic effect (Newmark, 1988, p. 70). He defines paraphrase as an amplification or explanation of the meaning of a text segment (Newmark, 1988, p. 90).

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995, p. 31) reduce translation methods to seven procedures, of which the first three (borrowing, calque, literal translation) are direct and the remaining four (transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation) are oblique. In their model, equivalence renders the same situation by completely different stylistic and structural means. Most equivalences are fixed expressions such as idioms, clichés and proverbs, and proverbs are described as perfect examples of this procedure (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958/1995, p. 38). Adaptation is presented as a special kind of equivalence, in which a new situation is created in the target culture when the original one is unknown there (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958/1995, p. 39). Baker (2011, pp. 76–85) describes six strategies for idioms and fixed expressions, which also cover proverbs: using an expression of similar meaning and form, using an expression of similar meaning but dissimilar form, borrowing the source-language expression, paraphrase, omission of a play on the idiom, and omission of the entire idiom. The first, second and fourth of these form the basis of the classification applied in this study.

## **2. Methods**

The study is descriptive and combines qualitative analysis of each example with simple quantitative counts. It is also contrastive, since every English proverb is compared with Uzbek material.

### **2.1. Data sources**

Three printed sources were used. The English proverbs and their origin were taken from the Little Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs, second edition (Knowles, 2016). Uzbek proverbs were searched in the collection O'zbek xalq maqollari (Mirzayev et al., 2005), which is arranged by themes, and in the trilingual collection Proverbs – Maqollar – Пословицы (Karamatova & Karamatov, 2000). Page numbers for Knowles refer to the electronic edition.

### **2.2. Selection of proverbs**

Thirty proverbs were selected by purposive sampling. A proverb was included if (a) Knowles identifies it as an English proverb, (b) its content is general, moral or everyday and not religious, and (c) it is well known enough to be checked against the Uzbek collections. Proverbs were chosen so that all four strategies could be observed, which means that the sample is not random.

### 2.3. Classification criteria

For each proverb, both Uzbek collections were searched by key words and by theme. The result was classified according to the criteria in Table 1, adapted from Baker (2011) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995). Borrowing and the two omission strategies described by Baker (2011, pp. 79, 84–85) were not applied, because the proverbs were analysed as isolated units without a surrounding text, and these strategies depend on context.

**Table 1. Classification criteria**

| Strategy                | Criterion                                                                                           | Example                                                                                    |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Full equivalence        | An Uzbek proverb with the same meaning and essentially the same image                               | Walls have ears – Devorning ham qulog'i bor                                                |
| Partial equivalence     | An Uzbek proverb with the same or very similar meaning but a different image or structure           | Don't count your chickens before they are hatched – Chuchvarani xom sanama                 |
| Literal translation     | No Uzbek proverb found; a word-for-word rendering is natural and keeps the image                    | Money is power – Pul – kuch                                                                |
| Descriptive translation | No Uzbek proverb found; the meaning is not clear from a word-for-word rendering, so it is explained | No names, no pack drill – the offender's name is not mentioned, nobody is held responsible |

When no Uzbek proverb was found, the choice between literal and descriptive translation depended on whether the intended meaning is recoverable from a word-for-word rendering. This follows Newmark's (1988, p. 70) condition that literal translation above the word level is appropriate only when the source and target meanings correspond closely. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995, p. 33) likewise define literal translation as a transfer that produces a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate target text. If the proverb relies on culture-specific realia or on a metaphorical transfer that is not transparent (for example, eggs and an omelette standing for sacrifice and a goal), it was treated as descriptive.

### 2.4. Procedure and reliability

The analysis was carried out in four steps: the English proverb was located in Knowles and its page recorded; both Uzbek collections were searched; the Uzbek text and page were recorded; and the strategy was assigned. In descriptive and literal cases the Uzbek rendering was produced by the researcher, and in the descriptive cases it was guided by the explanation in Knowles. Only one researcher classified the data, so inter-rater reliability was not measured. Absence of an equivalent means that none was found in the two consulted collections, not that none exists in Uzbek.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Overall distribution

**Table 2. Distribution of strategies (N = 30)**

| Strategy                | Number    | Percentage  |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Partial equivalence     | 11        | 36.7%       |
| Descriptive translation | 8         | 26.7%       |
| Full equivalence        | 7         | 23.3%       |
| Literal translation     | 4         | 13.3%       |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>30</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Uzbek proverb counterparts (full and partial equivalence together) were found for 18 proverbs (60.0%). For the remaining 12 (40.0%) the translator has to create a new rendering, either literally or descriptively. Seventeen of the 18 proverb counterparts came from O'zbek xalq maqollari (Mirzayev et al., 2005); the remaining one (proverb 18) was supplied by the trilingual collection (Karamatova & Karamatov, 2000, p. 242). The full list of examples is given in Appendix A.

#### 3.2. Full equivalence (7 proverbs)

Full equivalence was found for proverbs 1 to 7: There is a time for everything; Time is money; Walls have ears; Constant dropping wears away a stone; When the cat's away, the mice will play; Knowledge is power; Don't put the cart before the horse. In these cases the Uzbek proverb uses the same image as the English one. For example, the proverb about walls corresponds to Avaylab so'zla so'zingni, devorning ham qulog'i bor (Mirzayev et al., 2005, p. 424). The Uzbek version adds a warning to speak carefully, but its second line repeats the English image almost exactly. Similarly, Mushuk yo'g'ida sichqon tepaga chiqar parallels the English cat-and-mice proverb in every element.

#### 3.3. Partial equivalence (11 proverbs)

Partial equivalence was found for proverbs 8 to 18. In all of them the Uzbek proverb expresses a similar message but through different means. Two types of shift can be distinguished.

**Replacement of the image (7 proverbs).** The English image is replaced by one from local life.

Don't count your chickens before they are hatched becomes Chuchvarani xom sanama (Mirzayev et al., 2005, p. 221): chickens are replaced by dumplings, a national dish.

Let sleeping dogs lie becomes Yotgan ilonga tegma: the dog is replaced by a snake.

Look before you leap becomes Daryoga ot solmasdan avval kechuvini top: the leap is replaced by a river crossing on horseback, and the advice is to find the ford first.

Two is company, but three is none becomes Ikkovga birov botolmas, otliqqa yayov yetolmas: the idea of company is replaced by a pair of riders that a person on foot cannot join.

- Blood is thicker than water becomes Urug'-aymog'im – quyuq qaymog'im: the contrast of blood and water becomes a statement about clan and cream.
- Haste makes waste becomes Shoshqaloq to'g'ramchi qo'lini kesar: the abstract waste is replaced by the concrete picture of a hasty chopper who cuts his hand.
- Money has no smell becomes Pul otang kim, onang kim demaydi (Karamatova & Karamatov, 2000, p. 242): the image of smell is replaced by the idea that money does not ask whose son or daughter one is.

**Replacement of the image by a plain statement (4 proverbs).** A figurative English proverb is matched by a more direct Uzbek one.

- A friend in need is a friend indeed becomes Do'st og'ir kunda bilinar. The English rhyme need/indeed is lost.
- Time and tide wait for no man becomes Vaqt – g'animat, o'tsa – nadomat. The personified time and tide are replaced by an evaluation of time and a warning of regret.
- Easy come, easy go becomes Tez kelgan davlatning qadri yo'q.
- Actions speak louder than words becomes Gap bilguncha, ish bil.

### 3.4. Literal translation (4 proverbs)

Literal translation was used for proverbs 19 to 22: Boys will be boys; Money is power; Travel broadens the mind; Tomorrow is another day. These proverbs are short and their meaning is clear without explanation. They express general observations about children, money, learning and time, so a word-for-word rendering such as Pul – kuch or Ertaga boshqa kun is natural. It should be noted that such renderings are translations, not established Uzbek proverbs.

### 3.5. Descriptive translation (8 proverbs)

Descriptive translation was applied to proverbs 23 to 30. Two groups can be seen.

- **Culture-bound realia:** skittles (Life isn't all beer and skittles), the pack drill of the British army (No names, no pack drill), the halfpenny's worth of tar used on ships (Do not spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar), hare and hound hunting (You cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds) and buttered bread (The bread never falls but on its buttered side). A literal Uzbek rendering would not make sense to most readers.
- **Metaphorical transfer:** You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, Don't put all your eggs in one basket and You can't tell a book by its cover. Their images are understandable, but the actual message (sacrifice for a goal, spreading risk, judging people by appearance) is not recoverable from the words alone, so it has to be stated.

For example, No names, no pack drill was rendered as Aybdor nomi aytilmasa, hech kim javobgarlikka tortilmaydi, which gives the meaning but not the image.

## 4. Discussion

**The dominance of partial equivalence.** Partial equivalence was the most frequent strategy, which supports the view that proverbs usually express widely shared experience through culture-specific images. The two cultures often agree on the lesson but not on the picture.

Newmark (1988, p. 109) makes a similar observation when he notes that images tend to change when metaphors are embedded in proverbs, which are often culture-specific. Where an Uzbek proverb exists, its image comes from riders, fords, dumplings, cream and craft, not from English poultry, dogs or tides. This resembles what Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995, p. 39) call adaptation, a special kind of equivalence, although here the situation itself is known in Uzbek and only the image is replaced.

**Universal images transfer directly.** The seven fully equivalent proverbs rest on images that do not depend on a particular culture: ears, walls, falling drops, a cat and mice, a cart and a horse, and time and knowledge as resources. Everyday domestic and natural observations seem to produce the same proverbs in different languages, which is consistent with the idea that proverbs can reflect shared human experience.

**Form is harder to transfer than meaning.** Even when meaning was preserved, English features such as the rhyme in need/indeed were lost. In contrast, at least five of the Uzbek counterparts (items 1, 2, 9, 13 and 16) show rhyme or repeated sounds, so Uzbek proverbs seem to value rhythm and parallelism highly. A translator who selects an Uzbek counterpart gets a proverb that sounds natural, but gives up the original image and form.

**The need for paraphrase.** More than a quarter of the proverbs (26.7%) could be rendered only by explanation. These cases involve realia, such as the pack drill or the halfpenny's worth of tar, and metaphors that need to be unpacked. Baker (2011, p. 80) likewise describes paraphrase as by far the most common way of translating idioms when no match can be found in the target language or when idiomatic language would be stylistically inappropriate. The price is the loss of brevity and fixedness: a paraphrase is not a proverb.

**Practical implications.** The results suggest a simple decision sequence for translation students: first check an Uzbek proverb collection for a counterpart; if one exists, decide whether the change of image is acceptable in the context; if none exists, use a literal rendering only for short, transparent statements, and paraphrase when the image depends on foreign realia or on a hidden metaphor.

### Limitations

The sample is small and purposive, so the percentages describe this sample and should not be generalised to all English proverbs. The classification was made by one researcher, and the boundaries between full and partial equivalence and between literal and descriptive translation are partly a matter of judgement. Equivalents were searched only in two printed collections, and other Uzbek sources may contain additional counterparts. Further research could use a larger random sample, several independent coders and a comparison with published literary translations.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of 30 English proverbs shows that no single strategy covers all cases. Partial equivalence was the most frequent (36.7%), descriptive translation came second (26.7%), followed by full equivalence (23.3%) and literal translation (13.3%). A proverb counterpart exists for more than half of the proverbs, but only a quarter of the sample keeps the original image. Universal everyday images are easily transferred, while culture-bound realia and non-transparent metaphors require paraphrase. For translators and translation students, the most reliable approach is to combine a check of Uzbek proverb collections with a careful decision about the image and the form.

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## Appendix A. Data (N = 30)

K = Knowles (2016); M = Mirzayev et al. (2005); KK = Karamatova & Karamatov (2000).  
Page numbers for Knowles refer to the electronic edition.

| No. | English proverb                         | Uzbek                                                | Strategy | Sources      |
|-----|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| 1   | There is a time for everything          | Har narsaning vaqti bor, har bir qizning baxti bor.  | Full     | K 281; M 200 |
| 2   | Time is money                           | Vaqt aqchadur, g'ofil bo'lma, qochadur.              | Full     | K 204; M 403 |
| 3   | Walls have ears                         | Avaylab so'zla so'zingni, devorning ham qulog'i bor. | Full     | K 254; M 424 |
| 4   | Constant dropping wears away a stone    | Tomchi tosh teshar.                                  | Full     | K 108; M 386 |
| 5   | When the cat's away, the mice will play | Mushuk yo'g'ida sichqon tepaga chiqar.               | Full     | K 215; M 420 |
| 6   | Knowledge is power                      | Bilim – kuchda, kuch – bilimda.                      | Full     | K 178; M 137 |

| No. | English proverb                                       | Uzbek                                                                                           | Strategy    | Sources                     |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| 7   | Don't put the cart before the horse                   | Aravani ot oldiga chiqarib bo'lmas.                                                             | Full        | K 221; M 333                |
| 8   | A friend in need is a friend indeed                   | Do'st og'ir kunda bilinar.                                                                      | Partial     | K 140; M 98                 |
| 9   | Time and tide wait for no man                         | Vaqt – g'animat, o'tsa – nadomat.                                                               | Partial     | K 215; M 404                |
| 10  | Easy come, easy go                                    | Tez kelgan davlatning qadri yo'q.                                                               | Partial     | K 119; M 236                |
| 11  | Look before you leap                                  | Daryoga ot solmasdan avval kechuvini top.                                                       | Partial     | K 69; M 398                 |
| 12  | Haste makes waste                                     | Shoshqaloq to'g'ramchi qo'lini kesar.                                                           | Partial     | K 155; M 222                |
| 13  | Blood is thicker than water                           | Urug'-aymog'im – quyuq qaymog'im.                                                               | Partial     | K 131; M 267                |
| 14  | Let sleeping dogs lie                                 | Yotgan ilonga tegma.                                                                            | Partial     | K 69; M 429                 |
| 15  | Actions speak louder than words                       | Gap bilguncha, ish bil.                                                                         | Partial     | K 306; M 25                 |
| 16  | Two is company, but three is none                     | Ikkovga birov botolmas, otliqqa yayov yetolmas.                                                 | Partial     | K 141; M 17                 |
| 17  | Don't count your chickens before they are hatched     | Chuchvarani xom sanama.                                                                         | Partial     | K 216; M 221                |
| 18  | Money has no smell                                    | Pul otang kim, onang kim demaydi.                                                               | Partial     | K 203; KK 242               |
| 19  | Boys will be boys                                     | Bolalar bolaligini qiladi.                                                                      | Literal     | K 197; author's translation |
| 20  | Money is power                                        | Pul – kuch.                                                                                     | Literal     | K 203; author's translation |
| 21  | Travel broadens the mind                              | Sayohat ongni kengaytiradi.                                                                     | Literal     | K 284; author's translation |
| 22  | Tomorrow is another day                               | Ertaga boshqa kun.                                                                              | Literal     | K 143; author's translation |
| 23  | You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs     | Maqsadga erishish uchun ba'zan qurbonlik yoki zarar ko'rishga to'g'ri keladi.                   | Descriptive | K 231; author's paraphrase  |
| 24  | Don't put all your eggs in one basket                 | Hamma narsani bitta imkoniyatga tikmang, xavfni taqsimlang va zaxira variant tayyorlab qo'ying. | Descriptive | K 68; author's paraphrase   |
| 25  | You can't tell a book by its cover                    | Odamning tashqi ko'rinishiga qarab uning ichki dunyosini baholab bo'lmaydi.                     | Descriptive | K 46; author's paraphrase   |
| 26  | Life isn't all beer and skittles                      | Hayot faqat rohat va xursandchilikdan iborat emas.                                              | Descriptive | K 185; author's paraphrase  |
| 27  | Do not spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar           | Arzimas xarajatni ayab, katta ishni xavf ostiga qo'yma.                                         | Descriptive | K 278; author's paraphrase  |
| 28  | No names, no pack drill                               | Aybdor nomi aytilmasa, hech kim javobgarlikka tortilmaydi.                                      | Descriptive | K 254; author's paraphrase  |
| 29  | You cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds | Ikki qarama-qarshi tomonni bir vaqtda qo'llab bo'lmaydi, birini tanlash kerak.                  | Descriptive | K 287; author's paraphrase  |
| 30  | The bread never falls but on its buttered side        | Omadsizlik ko'pincha eng noqulay paytda ro'y beradi.                                            | Descriptive | K 199; author's paraphrase  |