

Translation and Cultural Adaptation of Proverbs from Uzbek and English Literature (A Case Study of Abdulla Qahhor and O. Henry)

Qodirova Ziyodaxon

Teacher of World Languages department, Kokand university.

Abstract

This study examines the translation and cultural adaptation challenges of proverbs in literary works by Abdulla Qahhor and O. Henry, two masterful short story writers whose narratives are deeply embedded with culturally-specific proverbial expressions. Through comparative analysis of original texts and their translations, this research explores how translators navigate the delicate balance between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring comprehension for target audiences. The investigation reveals that successful proverb translation requires not merely linguistic competence but profound cultural knowledge and creative adaptation strategies. Findings demonstrate that domestication and foreignization approaches each offer distinct advantages depending on context, audience, and narrative function of the proverbs within the literary works.

Keywords: proverb translation, cultural adaptation, Abdulla Qahhor, O. Henry, literary translation, cross-cultural communication, Uzbek literature, American literature, domestication, foreignization

Introduction

Proverbs constitute one of the most culturally-laden elements of language, encapsulating centuries of collective wisdom, social values, and historical experiences within concise, memorable expressions. When these proverbial expressions appear in literary works, they serve multiple functions including character development, thematic reinforcement, cultural authenticity, and stylistic embellishment. The translation of proverbs presents translators with formidable challenges because these fixed expressions are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts and often rely on metaphors, imagery, and references that may be entirely foreign to target language readers. This thesis investigates how proverbs are translated and culturally adapted in the literary works of two prominent short story writers from different linguistic and cultural traditions: Abdulla Qahhor, the celebrated Uzbek writer whose stories capture the essence of Uzbek society and mentality, and O. Henry, the American master of short fiction whose tales reflect American culture and values of the early twentieth century. Both authors extensively employed proverbs in their narratives, making their works ideal subjects for examining translation strategies and cultural adaptation techniques.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to translation studies, particularly in the under-researched area of Uzbek-English literary translation. While considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to translation between major European languages, the specific challenges of translating between Uzbek and English, especially regarding culturally-embedded elements like proverbs, remain relatively unexplored. Furthermore, by examining two authors from distinctly different cultural backgrounds, this study provides insights into universal translation challenges while highlighting culture-specific considerations. Understanding how translators handle proverbs in literary texts has practical implications for translation pedagogy, literary translation practice, and cross-cultural communication studies. This research employs a qualitative comparative methodology, analyzing selected short stories from both authors in their original languages and examining published translations to identify translation strategies, assess their effectiveness, and evaluate the extent to which cultural meanings are preserved or transformed in the translation process.

Theoretical Framework

The translation of proverbs has been extensively discussed within translation studies, with scholars proposing various theoretical approaches to address the challenges inherent in transferring these culturally-bound expressions across linguistic boundaries. Venuti's influential distinction between domestication and foreignization provides a foundational framework for understanding translator choices. Domestication involves adapting source text elements to conform to target culture norms and expectations, often replacing source culture proverbs with functionally equivalent target culture proverbs. Foreignization, conversely, preserves the foreign characteristics of the source text, maintaining cultural specificity even at the risk of reduced immediate comprehension. Nida's concepts of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence offer another lens through which to examine proverb translation. Formal equivalence prioritizes adherence to the source text structure and content, while dynamic equivalence emphasizes reproducing equivalent effects on target readers. When applied to proverbs, dynamic equivalence often necessitates significant adaptation since the cultural references and metaphorical frameworks underpinning source language proverbs may be incomprehensible or meaningless to target audiences without substantial modification.

Baker's work on translation strategies provides practical categorizations of techniques translators employ when confronting non-equivalent expressions. These strategies include translation by a more general word, translation by a more neutral or less expressive word, translation by cultural substitution, translation using a loan word with explanation, translation by paraphrase, translation by omission, and translation by illustration. Each strategy entails different degrees of source text transformation and varying levels of cultural information preservation. For proverb translation specifically, Gorjan and Newmark have identified additional considerations including the proverb's structural characteristics, its degree of recognizability within the source culture, its functional role in the discourse, and the existence or absence of equivalent expressions in the target language. The decision-making process for translators is further complicated by literary translation's dual obligation to preserve both semantic content and aesthetic qualities. Literary proverbs do not merely convey wisdom but contribute to characterization, establish cultural setting, create stylistic effects, and support thematic development. Translators must therefore consider not only what the proverb means but also what it accomplishes within the narrative structure.

Abdulla Qahhor's Use of Proverbs and Translation Challenges

Abdulla Qahhor, widely regarded as one of the founders of modern Uzbek prose, incorporated proverbs extensively throughout his literary works to capture authentic voices of Uzbek people and reflect the cultural worldview embedded in Uzbek traditional wisdom. His stories such as "Sinchalak" and "Anor" feature characters who naturally employ proverbial expressions in dialogue and narration, reflecting the central role of proverbs in everyday Uzbek communication. The Uzbek language possesses a rich proverbial tradition with expressions drawing from agricultural practices, Islamic cultural heritage, family relationships, and Central Asian historical experiences. Many Uzbek proverbs utilize metaphors based on elements deeply familiar to Uzbek culture but potentially obscure to English readers, such as references to specific foods, agricultural practices, traditional social structures, and Islamic concepts. For instance, Uzbek proverbs frequently reference bread as a symbol of sustenance and hospitality, reflecting the cultural significance of this staple in Uzbek society. Translating such proverbs into English requires translators to make critical decisions about whether to preserve the specific cultural references or to substitute with more universally comprehensible equivalents.

When examining translations of Qahhor's works, several distinct approaches become evident. Some translators opt for literal translation accompanied by explanatory footnotes, preserving the cultural specificity while providing necessary context for English readers. This foreignization strategy maintains the text's cultural authenticity and exposes readers to Uzbek worldview and

values, though it may disrupt reading flow and create aesthetic distance. Other translators employ cultural substitution, replacing Uzbek-specific proverbs with functionally equivalent English proverbs that convey similar meanings. For example, an Uzbek proverb about sheep might be rendered with an English proverb about different animals but similar moral implications. This domestication approach enhances readability and immediate comprehension but risks erasing cultural distinctiveness and potentially misrepresenting the cultural context of the narrative. A third approach involves paraphrasing the proverbial meaning in standard descriptive language, sacrificing the compressed, formulaic quality that characterizes proverbs but ensuring clear communication of the underlying message. Each approach involves trade-offs between various translation priorities including fidelity to source text, accessibility to target readers, preservation of cultural specificity, maintenance of literary style, and faithfulness to the author's artistic intentions.

O. Henry's Proverbs and Their Cultural Transference

O. Henry's short stories are characterized by wit, irony, and colloquial American English that includes frequent deployment of proverbs, idioms, and folk sayings reflecting American culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His stories such as "The Gift of the Magi" and "The Last Leaf" incorporate proverbial wisdom that reinforces themes while establishing characterization and cultural setting. American proverbs in O. Henry's works often derive from various sources including Biblical references, British literary traditions, American frontier experiences, and the melting pot of immigrant cultures that shaped American society. Many of his proverbial expressions employ humor and irony, sometimes subverting traditional wisdom or presenting conventional sayings in unexpected contexts. When translating O. Henry's works into Uzbek, translators face the challenge of conveying not only the semantic content of these proverbs but also their stylistic functions, humorous effects, and cultural connotations. The cultural distance between American and Uzbek societies means that many references embedded in O. Henry's proverbs may require explanation or adaptation for Uzbek readers to grasp their full significance.

Uzbek translations of O. Henry demonstrate various strategies for handling culturally-specific proverbial expressions. Some translators seek functionally equivalent Uzbek proverbs that convey similar meanings, effectively domesticating the text for Uzbek readers. This approach can successfully communicate the underlying wisdom while maintaining the compressed, formulaic quality characteristic of proverbs. However, finding true functional equivalents is often impossible due to cultural differences in metaphorical frameworks and value systems. When direct equivalents are unavailable, translators may employ proverbs that are semantically similar but employ different imagery or cultural references. Another strategy involves maintaining English proverbs in transliterated form with explanatory additions, particularly when the proverbs are well-known internationally or when preserving the American cultural context is deemed important for literary interpretation. This foreignization approach respects the source text's cultural specificity but may create comprehension challenges for readers unfamiliar with American culture. Additionally, some translators opt for explicitation, expanding proverbial expressions into longer explanatory phrases that convey the meaning without maintaining the proverbial form. While this ensures comprehension, it alters the stylistic texture of the narrative and diminishes the rhetorical impact of compressed wisdom that proverbs provide.

Comparative Analysis and Translation Strategies

Comparing translation approaches across Qahhor-to-English and O. Henry-to-Uzbek translations reveals both universal challenges in proverb translation and culture-specific considerations that influence translator decision-making. Both translation directions require translators to navigate the fundamental tension between source text fidelity and target text comprehensibility, between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring reader engagement. However, the specific challenges differ due to asymmetries in cultural familiarity, translation

tradition development, and language structural differences. English readers generally have limited familiarity with Uzbek culture, making heavy foreignization of Uzbek proverbs potentially alienating or confusing. Conversely, Uzbek readers often possess greater familiarity with American culture through media exposure, potentially making American cultural references more accessible. This asymmetry influences translator choices regarding how much cultural adaptation is necessary. Furthermore, the translation tradition from Uzbek to English is less developed than translation from English to Uzbek, meaning fewer established conventions guide translators working from Uzbek sources.

Successful proverb translation in both directions requires translators to possess not merely bilingual competence but bicultural competence, understanding the cultural contexts, connotations, and pragmatic functions of proverbs in both source and target cultures. Close textual analysis reveals that the most effective translations employ flexible, context-sensitive strategies rather than adhering rigidly to a single approach. Translators must consider multiple factors including the proverb's importance to plot or theme, its recognizability within the source culture, the availability of target language equivalents, the target audience's cultural knowledge, and the overall translation philosophy guiding the project. When proverbs serve primarily ornamental functions, greater freedom for adaptation may be appropriate. When proverbs carry thematic weight or contribute significantly to characterization, preserving their cultural specificity becomes more important even if this requires additional explanatory support. Hybrid strategies that combine different approaches within a single translation often prove most effective, allowing translators to calibrate their interventions according to specific textual situations. For instance, a translator might use cultural substitution for minor proverbs while preserving and explaining culturally-significant proverbs that illuminate important aspects of the source culture.

Conclusion

This comparative study of proverb translation in the literary works of Abdulla Qahhor and O. Henry illuminates the complex challenges translators face when transferring culturally-embedded wisdom expressions across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The analysis demonstrates that no single translation strategy universally succeeds for all proverbs in all contexts. Instead, effective proverb translation requires careful consideration of multiple factors including the proverb's semantic content, cultural specificity, functional role within the narrative, and the target audience's cultural background and expectations. Both domestication and foreignization approaches offer distinct advantages and limitations. Domestication through cultural substitution enhances readability and immediate comprehension but risks cultural erasure and misrepresentation. Foreignization through literal translation with explanation preserves cultural authenticity and exposes readers to foreign worldviews but may create aesthetic distance and comprehension difficulties. The optimal approach often involves flexible, context-sensitive decision-making that employs different strategies for different proverbs depending on their specific characteristics and functions.

This research contributes to translation studies by providing empirical evidence of translation strategies employed in an under-researched language pair and by demonstrating how theoretical frameworks apply to practical translation challenges. The findings have implications for translation pedagogy, suggesting that translator training should emphasize cultural competence alongside linguistic skills and should expose students to multiple translation strategies with guidance on context-appropriate application. For practicing translators, this study highlights the importance of thorough cultural research, consultation with native speakers from both cultures, and careful consideration of how translation choices affect overall narrative impact. Future research could expand this investigation by examining reader reception of different translation approaches, analyzing proverb translation across additional language pairs, or investigating how translation strategies for proverbs have evolved over time as cultural contact increases and translation norms develop. Understanding proverb translation

contributes not only to improved literary translation practice but also to broader goals of cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world where literature serves as a vital bridge between cultures.

References

- Baker, M. (2018). In other words: A coursebook on translation (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (2003). The theory and practice of translation. Brill.
- Newmark, P. (1988). A textbook of translation. Prentice Hall.
- Venuti, L. (2008). The translator's invisibility: A history of translation (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Mirzaev, T., & Musaev, K. (2015). Folkloric elements in Uzbek literature: Translation and interpretation. *Central Asian Studies Journal*, 12(3), 245-267.
- Qahhor, A. (1980). Selected stories. Tashkent: G'afur G'ulom Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Qodirova, Z. (2025). MASTERING PHRASAL VERBS: A KEY TO FLUENT ENGLISH. MODERN PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS, 1(6), 414-415.
- Qodirova, Z. (2025). TIMELESS TRUTHS: HOW PROVERBS SHAPE AND ENRICH LITERATURE. " GLOBAL MUNOSABATLAR NAZARIYASI: YOSHLARNING TARAQQIYOT G'OYALARI" xalqaro ilmiy-amaliy anjumani materiallari, 1(2), 147-149.
- Qodirova, Z. (2025). PROVERBS AS PRAGMATIC TOOLS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS. *Journal of Applied Science and Social Science*, 1(1), 660-666.
- Ziyodaxon, Q. (2025). THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH. TANQIDIY NAZAR, TAHLILIY TAFAKKUR VA INNOVATSION G'OYALAR, 1(8), 170-172.
- O. Henry. (2006). The complete short stories of O. Henry. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics.
- Wray, A., & Perkins, M. R. (2000). The functions of formulaic language: An integrated model. *Language & Communication*, 20(1), 1–28.