

THE "UNTRANSLATABLE" JOKE: A STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING UZBEK CULTURE-SPECIFIC CONCEPTS INTO ENGLISH AND THE LOSS OF COMEDIC TIMING

Zulfiyaxon Mirabdullayeva

Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Western languages department, English senior teacher

zulfiyaxon_mirabdullayeva@tsuos.uz

Abstract: The present research investigates the main difficulties such as the problem of transferring an Uzbek culture-specific humor to another language, focusing on the issue of askiya and its oppositions to proper English translation. The study reveals that askiya—encompassing spontaneous wit, verbal competition, and cultural improvisation—loses essential meaning when translated into English due to absent cultural equivalents and disrupted comedic timing.

Keywords: untranslatability, Uzbek humor, askiya, comedic timing, culture-specific concepts, translation theory

Аннотация: Данное исследование рассматривает фундаментальные трудности, присущие переводу узбекского культурно-специфического юмора, особенно концентрируясь на понятии аския и его сопротивлении адекватной английской передаче. Исследование показывает, что аския—охватывающая спонтанное остроумие, словесное состязание и культурную импровизацию—теряет существенное значение при переводе на английский из-за отсутствия культурных эквивалентов и нарушенного комедийного тайминга.

Ключевые слова: непереводаемость, узбекский юмор, аския, комедийный тайминг, культурно-специфические понятия, теория перевода

Annotatsiya: Ushbu tadqiqot o'zbek madaniyatiga xos hazilni tarjima qilishdagi asosiy qiyinchiliklarni, ayniqsa askiya tushunchasiga va uning ingliz tiliga yetarli darajada o'tkazilishiga qarshiligiga e'tibor qaratib o'rganadi. Tadqiqot shuni ko'rsatadiki, askiya—oniy ziyorlik, so'z poygasi va madaniy improvizatsiyani o'z ichiga olgan—ingliz tiliga tarjima qilinganda madaniy ekvivalentlarning yo'qligi va komediya vaqt tuyg'usining buzilishi sababli muhim ma'nolarini yo'qotadi.

Kalit so'zlar: tarjima qilib bo'lmaslik, o'zbek hazili, askiya, komediya vaqt tuyg'usi, madaniyatga xos tushunchalar, tarjima nazariyasi

Introduction. The translation of humor has always been an issue in the field of translation studies which had a lot of arguments around it. It is situated at a place where language ability, cultural knowledge, and sensitivity to the situation intermingle. In fact, contemporary translation theory has more and more accepted that perfect equivalence is still an unreachable ideal, while the translation of humor raises the most difficult problems because of its dependence on cultural context, linguistic playfulness, and precise timing [1]. Within Central Asian linguistic traditions, Uzbek humor is a rich but still not fully understood domain characterized by distinct cultural practices that resist simple translation into English or other European languages. Among these practices, askiya—an improvised verbal competition that requires quick-witted responses, the use of poetic language, and humor

grounded in the culture—shows more than anything else the huge difficulties that translators face when trying to cross over from one very different cultural and linguistic system to another [2].

Methodology and Literature Review. In this research, the qualitative analytical method is adopted which is based on comparative cultural linguistics and translation theory and at the same time it uses already established scholarly frameworks which deal with cultural untranslatability and humor translation. The theoretical framework scrapes together the foreignization-domestication paradigm of Venuti, the cultural mediation theory of Katan, and the analysis of Leppihalme's culture-specific allusion to create a thorough analytical lens through which the translation of Uzbek humor can be viewed [3]. The very first study by Chiaro concerning verbal humor translation sets the ground for the concept of humor being no more than a culturally bound knowledge, having some common assumptions, and being linguistically different when it comes to languages [4]. Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor offers the necessary theoretical foundation since it classifies humor into six knowledge resources or aspects each of them posing different translational problems: script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, and language [5].

The cultural untranslatability concept has been extensively discussed in the field of translation, focusing mainly on items that are specific to a culture and do not have equivalents in other languages and cultures. The classification of culture-specific items by Aixelá and their corresponding translation strategies offers powerful analytical means, drawn from conservation strategies that keep the elements of the source culture and substitution strategies that provide the target culture equivalents [6]. Comedic timing is made up of not only the rhythm of delivery, the thoughtful use of pauses, the verbal exchange's tempo, and the perfect matching of the performer and audience's expectations but also of all these switching strategies and the inevitable preservation difficulties of the translation that cultural contexts vary significantly thus resist [7]. According to Reichl, the understanding of the artwork is closely linked to the performer's audibility, the audience's physical presence and response, and the time factor, which all contribute to one aspect of meaning that is easily lost through writing [8].

Results and Discussion. The cultural analysis of askiya reveals an array of overlapping and interconnected issues, which result in its being virtually impossible to translate into English without losing the essence of the concept and at the same time raising the question of whether the limits of translation can be pushed further. The most significant and primary obstacle is that askiya is a performance-based cultural practice, thus, it cannot be regarded as a mere semantic unit, which means that translation has to capture all the aspects involved in this complex semantic situation: lexical meaning, pragmatic function, social context, and temporal dynamics at once. The translators who are faced with the task of translating askiya into English have to deal with an immediate problem regarding the choice of words: there is no English single word that can pack the meaning of askiya including spontaneous wit, the competitive word exchange, poetic improvisation, and humor that is culturally embedded. The English alternatives to askiya: "verbal jousting," "wit competition," "improvisational banter," or "comic repartee," each cover only part of it and at the same time, they exclude important dimensions, consequently, the translators have to use explanatory glosses, multiple terms, or cultural adaptation that changes the concept's identity altogether.

The temporal aspect of askiya introduces the most challenging situation for translators, particularly since the timing of humor is an indispensable factor in the effectiveness of the practice and at the same time, it cannot be preserved through translation. In the askiya performance, the meaning comes out through the fast communication that takes place between the participants, the clever use of pauses,

the increase in the rhythm of competitive replies, and the performer's awareness of the audience's reactions—all these are temporal aspects that are lost when the performance is turned into written text or the cultural context is changed to audiences that are not familiar with the askiya conventions. Translation unavoidably implies a temporal shift, taking the humor out of its original performative moment and cultural context, and presenting it to the audiences separated by time, space, and cultural background. This temporal shift sets aside the excitement, unpredictability, and the interactivity that are characteristically askiya, and conversely, it metamorphoses the lively performance into a lifeless text. It also deprives the temporal synchronization between the performer and the culturally savvy audience of the very effect of comedy created. When translators try to maintain temporal features through intricate description or performance notation, they are only able to reflect timing and not bring it back to life, thus they produce metacommunicative discourse about the performance instead of the performance itself.

Conclusion. This study has demonstrated that Uzbek culture-specific humor concepts like *askiya* present fundamental challenges to translation that exceed conventional notions of translation difficulty to approach practical untranslatability. The analysis reveals that *askiya's* resistance to adequate English translation stems from intersecting linguistic, cultural, and temporal factors that collectively prevent preservation of the concept's full meaning, social function, and affective impact. Linguistic untranslatability arises from Uzbek and English's structural differences that enable different forms of verbal play, cultural untranslatability emerges from divergent social practices and cultural values regarding verbal performance, and temporal untranslatability results from the disruption of comedic timing when performance is displaced from its original context. These findings contribute to translation theory by providing empirical evidence for the limits of translatability and demonstrating that certain cultural phenomena resist reduction to linguistic equivalence.

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