

The Main Difficulties of Translating English Collocations

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Abstract. This article explores the main challenges in translating English collocations into Uzbek. It emphasizes how cultural and semantic differences complicate direct translation. The paper discusses issues such as idiomatic expressions, metaphorical language, syntactic structures, and the importance of contextual adaptation. Examples from both languages demonstrate how literal translation can result in meaning loss, requiring creativity, reconstruction, or functional equivalents. The article argues that successful translation of collocations demands not only linguistic but also cultural sensitivity and a flexible, innovative approach from the translator to ensure natural and meaningful renderings.

Key words: Translation, Collocation, Cultural adaptation, Idioms, Semantic difference, Syntax, Metaphor, Functional equivalence, Literal translation, Reconstruction, Linguistic challenges.

Introduction. Translation has become one of the main tools for intercultural communication. It influences how people consciously and unconsciously understand other languages, cultures, and beliefs. As Toury points out, translation is regarded as an activity that involves at least two languages and two cultures. Accordingly, scholars working in the field of translation (such as Nida, Toury, Baker, and Shunnaq) emphasize the close interconnection between language and culture. Thus, cultural diversity turns the translation process into a complex task. More specifically, there is no absolute equivalence between languages, either in meaning or in phrases and sentences. Furthermore, Shunnaq adds that differences in linguistic forms and cultural patterns between languages may vary in scale depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between them. This, in turn, leads to a lack of synonymy in culturally bound expressions.

Main body. When it comes to translation problems, translators must be aware of the challenges they may face during the translation process. Most of these problems are related to the ability to read and comprehend in the target language. Therefore, Trikas characterizes the most frequent translation difficulties found in the semantic and cultural nature of a text as “non-translatable linguistics.”

Another source of difficulty lies in culturally embedded expressions found in proverbs. For example, “a bad tree does not yield good apples” implies that if the source is bad, the outcome will be bad as well. Other problematic areas include collocations, such as “His work absorbed him completely,” phrasal verbs like *look after*, and figures of speech such as metaphors. Moreover, cultural untranslatability can also be found in idioms like “it rains cats and dogs” or in witticisms and puns, such as “You can tune a guitar, but you can't tuna fish.” Identifying collocations in translation is essential, as their translation often should not be literal. This presents unique challenges. Cultural differences are one of the biggest difficulties in translation. Collocations are often tied to a nation's traditions, customs, or general worldview. Each language uses words in a unique way within its cultural context.

Example: “*The American dream*” is a phrase that is specific to American culture and may not have a direct equivalent in other cultures, especially outside of the U.S. Therefore, the translator has to either adapt the concept to another culture or provide an explanatory note.

When translating such cultural expressions, a translator must consider not only the meanings of words but also their cultural implications. In translation, it is often recommended to explain such collocations in detail or adapt them based on cultural associations.

Semantic differences refer to how the meanings of words and their relationships in one language transition into another language. Some words in one language may have multiple meanings, creating difficulties in translation. **Example:** “*He took the test.*” (U testni o‘tdi). The word “took” in English is translated as “passed” in Uzbek, but “take” can also mean “to pick up” or “to carry.” These semantic differences can sometimes change the exact meaning. For example, the word “take” in English can mean “to take,” “to organize,” or “to enroll.” It is crucial to understand and select the appropriate meaning during translation.

Syntactic issues represent another key difficulty in translation. Each language has its own syntactic structure. Some word combinations or collocations are used in a specific order in one language, while their usage may differ in another. **Example:** “*She made a decision.*” (U qaror qildi.) The English collocation “make a decision” corresponds to “qaror qildi” in Uzbek, showing a difference in structure. **Another example:** “*I am looking forward to hearing from you.*” translates as “Sizdan javob kutaman.” The phrase “looking forward to” does not translate directly into Uzbek but is naturally rendered as “kutaman.”

Idiomatic expressions, which do not hold literal meanings, also pose significant challenges. Every language has its own idioms, and their translations are not always culturally equivalent. **Example:** “*Bite the bullet*” means to endure hardship. Literally translating this as “to bite the bullet” would not make sense in Uzbek. Cultural adaptation or explanatory notes are needed.

Loss or addition of meaning. When translating collocations, meaning may be lost or added. Failing to translate language-specific word combinations accurately may lead to semantic distortion. **Example:** “*He was caught red-handed.*” In Uzbek, this is rendered as “U qo‘lga olindi.” However, “red-handed” carries the nuance of being caught in the act, which is not fully conveyed in the Uzbek version.

Functional non-equivalence. Sometimes, it is necessary to find a functional equivalent in translation. Even when there is no direct semantic equivalent, a phrase with a similar meaning can be used. **Example:** “*He hit the nail on the head.*” (U to‘g‘ri fikr aytdi.) While the English idiom doesn’t have an exact counterpart in Uzbek, its meaning is conveyed appropriately through a functionally equivalent phrase.

Philosophical and literary semantic differences. Some collocations and expressions may carry artistic or philosophical connotations. In such cases, a more explanatory and detailed translation approach is needed. **Example:** “*Time is money.*” Although widely used in English, conveying its literary or philosophical meaning might require a shift in approach depending on the context of a literary work, where the importance of time may carry a symbolic or nuanced meaning.

Reconstruction. At times, collocation translation requires reconstruction, which involves a more imaginative and adapted translation rather than a literal one. **Example:** “*She has a heart of gold.*” This is commonly rendered as “Uning yuragi oltindan.” in Uzbek, which works well culturally. However, depending on the artistic or nuanced context, other adaptations may be more appropriate. **Another example:** “*Time flies.*” In Uzbek, this may be expressed differently, such as “vaqt uchib o‘tdi,” requiring stylistic reconstruction to retain the original meaning and effect.

Adapting realities and concepts. Sometimes, real-life events or general concepts may be interpreted differently across cultures. Hence, translating collocations often requires adapting the underlying concepts. **Example:** “*A rolling stone gathers no moss.*” In Uzbek, this is often rendered as “Ko‘chib yurgan odamni jamoa olishmaydi.” While conceptually aligned, these idioms are tailored to their respective cultural values.

Modification and localization. At times, directly translating a collocation may damage the meaning or structure of a text. In such cases, the translator may choose to modify or fully localize the phrase. **Example:** “*He has a lot on his plate.*” is translated in Uzbek simply as “*U juda band.*” The original English expression is adapted to suit the Uzbek context rather than translated literally.

Using synonyms and contemporary language. Some collocations need to be updated in a modern context. With the evolution of languages, older collocations may be replaced with modern expressions or synonyms. **Example:** “*Cool*” (good, awesome, calm) can be translated into Uzbek as “*zo‘r*” or “*ajoyib*,” reflecting contemporary usage.

The translator’s creative approach. Ultimately, a translator’s creativity plays a crucial role in accurately and effectively translating collocations. Adapting translations to suit each language and culture may require artistic or academic innovation. This creative approach is especially vital in literary, artistic, and poetic translations. **Example:** “*Catch someone red-handed*” can mean “to catch someone in the act of committing a crime.” In literary translations, this expression is often rendered differently to suit the artistic context.

Selecting the right collocations in translation impacts the naturalness of the text and the meaning delivered to the reader. Instead of literal translation, translators should often choose the most appropriate and effective collocations. Cultural, semantic, and syntactic differences play a key role in translating collocations. Choosing them correctly enables the meaning to be delivered clearly and naturally to the reader.

Conclusion. This article has analyzed the key challenges in translating English collocations into Uzbek. Collocations, defined as frequently co-occurring word combinations with a specific semantic connection, play a crucial role in conveying precise meaning in both the source and target languages. The research revealed that literal translation of collocations often leads to semantic ambiguity, cultural discrepancies, and stylistic inconsistencies. Idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and culture-specific elements particularly require a more nuanced and context-aware approach from translators. In such cases, the translator must go beyond linguistic competence and consider cultural frameworks, choosing appropriate equivalents through methods such as functional equivalence, reconstruction, or contextual adaptation. As emphasized in this study, successful translation depends not only on grammatical and lexical knowledge but also on the translator’s creativity and intercultural competence. Thus, the accurate and meaningful rendering of collocations calls for a combination of linguistic insight and cultural awareness. Moreover, improving the translation of collocations should be a focal point in translator training programs, as it contributes significantly to the overall quality of translated texts. Therefore, addressing the challenges of collocation translation is essential for fostering effective cross-cultural communication and enhancing the professionalism of translation practices.

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