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CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING ETIQUETTE EXPRESSIONS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Abstract. The article investigates the difficulties of translating and interpreting etiquette expressions between English and Uzbek, which require the translator to reconcile form, communicative function and the cultural expectations of the target audience. On the basis of functionalist translation theory and interpreting studies, eight groups of challenges are identified: asymmetry of pronouns and honorifics, religiously marked formulas, culture-specific blessings, the volume of ceremonial discourse, genre conventions of correspondence, audiovisual constraints, machine translation errors and the interpreter's role in interaction. It is argued that etiquette expressions should be translated at the level of communicative purpose, while the preservation of cultural colour should depend on the text type.
Keywords: etiquette expression, translation, interpreting, functional equivalence, skopos, honorifics, cultural mediation, English, Uzbek.

Annotatsiya. Maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillari o'rtasida etiket ifodalarini yozma va og'zaki tarjima qilishdagi qiyinchiliklar tadqiq etiladi; bunda tarjimon shakl, kommunikativ vazifa va tarjima adresatining madaniy kutilmalarini muvofiqlashtirishi lozim. Funksional tarjima nazariyasi va og'zaki tarjimashunoslikka tayangan holda qiyinchiliklarning sakkiz guruhi aniqlanadi: olmosh va hurmat shakllaridagi nomuvofiqlik, diniy tus olgan formulalar, milliy duo va tilaklar, tantanali nutq hajmi, rasmiy yozishmalar janr me'yorlari, audiovizual tarjima cheklovlari, mashina tarjimasi xatolari va muloqotda tarjimonning roli. Etiket ifodalari kommunikativ maqsad darajasida tarjima qilinishi, milliy koloritning saqlanishi esa matn turiga bog'liq bo'lishi lozimligi asoslanadi.
Kalit so'zlar: etiket ifodasi, yozma tarjima, og'zaki tarjima, funksional ekvivalentlik, skopos, hurmat shakllari, madaniy vositachilik, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili.

Аннотация. В статье исследуются трудности письменного и устного перевода этикетных выражений между английским и узбекским языками, при котором переводчик должен согласовать форму, коммуникативную функцию и культурные ожидания адресата. На основе функциональной теории перевода и теории устного перевода выделены восемь групп трудностей: асимметрия местоимений и гонорифики, религиозно маркированные формулы, культурно-специфические благопожелания, объём церемониального дискурса, жанровые нормы переписки, ограничения аудиовизуального перевода, ошибки машинного перевода и роль переводчика в общении. Обосновывается, что этикетные выражения следует переводить на уровне коммуникативной цели, а сохранение национального колорита должно зависеть от типа текста.

Ключевые слова: этикетное выражение, письменный перевод, устный перевод, функциональная эквивалентность, скопос, гонорифика, культурное посредничество, английский язык, узбекский язык.

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of international cooperation in Uzbekistan has considerably increased the volume of translation and interpreting between English and Uzbek in diplomacy, education, business, tourism and the media. In all these areas translators and interpreters constantly deal with etiquette expressions: forms of address, greetings, words of welcome and gratitude, wishes, congratulations, condolences and the opening and closing formulas of letters and speeches.

Although etiquette expressions seem the easiest part of translation, being short, frequent and listed in every phrasebook, they are one of its most sensitive points: a text accurate in content but inappropriate in etiquette may damage relations between the parties, and a greeting rendered too literally or too freely may seem cold, excessively formal or disrespectful. As D. Katan notes, the translator acts as a mediator between cultures [5], and this role is most visible in etiquette.

Uzbek translation studies emphasise adequacy and the preservation of national colour [6; 10], and the principles of equivalence have been developed in detail by V. N. Komissarov [1]. However, the specific problems of rendering etiquette expressions between English and Uzbek, especially in interpreting, subtitling and machine translation, have not been described systematically. The aim of this article is to identify these challenges, determine their sources and propose practical ways of overcoming them.

METHODS

The study is based on functionalist translation theory, according to which the translation solution is determined by the purpose (skopos) of the target text [8], and on E. Nida's dynamic equivalence [7]. J. House's concepts of covert translation and the cultural filter [4] and L. Venuti's opposition of domestication and foreignisation [11] were used to describe cultural adaptation. Interpreting was analysed with reference to D. Gile's effort models [3], F. Pöchhacker [9] and C. Wadensjö [12], and subtitling in line with J. Díaz Cintas and A. Remael [2].

The material included etiquette expressions from official correspondence, ceremonial speeches and toasts, fiction and films with their translations or subtitles, and liaison interpreting in tourism, education and business observed by the author; a number of formulas were also tested in online machine translation systems. The problems were identified, classified by source and evaluated in relation to text type and translation purpose. The study is qualitative and does not estimate the frequency of the problems.

RESULTS

The analysis made it possible to distinguish eight groups of challenges. They are summarised in Table 1 and discussed below.

Table 1. Main challenges of translating and interpreting etiquette expressions between English and Uzbek

Challenge	Example	Recommended solution
1. Pronouns and honorifics	you → sen / siz; Dadam keldilar; Karim aka	Choose sen/siz from context; render respect lexically: my father, Mr Karimov
2. Religiously marked formulas	Assalomu alaykum; Xudo xohlasa; Alhamdulillah	Functional equivalent in business texts; transliteration in fiction
3. Culture-specific blessings	Hormang; Osh bo'lsin; Baraka toping	Functional equivalent or paraphrase; literal rendering only in fiction
4. Volume of ceremonial discourse	Long lists of addressees and wishes in Uzbek speeches	Selective compression in interpreting; adapting length in written translation
5. Genre conventions of correspondence	Dear Sir or Madam; Yours faithfully; Hurmat bilan	Replace with target-genre formulas, not literal translation
6. Audiovisual constraints	Hey, Oh, come on, Sorry, Excuse me in fast dialogue	Omission or condensation within character limits; preserve address forms
7. Machine translation errors	Osh bo'lsin; Break a leg; Take care	Human post-editing with a checklist of etiquette formulas
8. Interpreter's role in interaction	Greetings addressed to the interpreter; blessings, invitations	Clear role boundaries; brief rendering or non-verbal handling

Pronouns and honorifics. When translating English "you", the translator must choose between "sen" and "siz" on the basis of the age, status and relationship of the participants, and in fiction and film must also decide when characters switch from "siz" to "sen"; an unmotivated switch suggests rudeness or intimacy. Conversely, the Uzbek honorific plural for one person ("Dadam keldilar") and address forms such as "Karim aka" or "Nodira opa" have no grammatical equivalent in English. In business texts they are best conveyed by titles and surnames ("Mr Karimov"); in fiction the kinship term may be kept in transliteration to preserve national colour.

Religiously marked formulas. Formulas of Arabic origin such as "Assalomu alaykum", "Xudo xohlasa" and "Alhamdulillah" often function in Uzbek as neutral etiquette elements, whereas their literal English equivalents ("Peace be upon you", "God willing", "Thank God") are strongly marked. In business interpreting, "Xudo xohlasa", which often means simply "hopefully", may be rendered as "God willing" and understood by an English-speaking partner as a lack of commitment. Functional equivalents are therefore preferable in business and official contexts, while transliteration may be used in fiction and ethnographic texts.

Culture-specific blessings. Blessings such as "Hormang", "Osh bo'lsin", "Baraka toping" or "Qo'lingiz dard ko'rmasin" have no direct English equivalents; their literal translation ("May your hands not know pain") is understandable but exotic and may distract the listener. The interpreter should usually render their function by an English formula used in the same situation ("Thank you so much",

"Enjoy your meal"). Conversely, idiomatic English formulas such as "Break a leg" or "Knock on wood" become meaningless or even offensive when translated literally into Uzbek.

Volume of ceremonial discourse. Uzbek ceremonial speeches begin with a long list of addressees ("Hurmatli mehmonlar, muhtaram ustozlar, aziz do'stlar...") and end with a chain of wishes, while English speeches have a much shorter etiquette frame. For the simultaneous interpreter such segments may exhaust the processing capacity needed for the following content [3], so experienced interpreters use selective compression, rendering the general address ("Distinguished guests, dear friends") and the central wish. Conversely, an informal English opening ("Thanks, it's great to be here") may need to be elevated for an official Uzbek audience ("Taklif uchun samimiy minnatdorchilik bildiraman").

Genre conventions of official correspondence. In business and official letters, etiquette formulas should be replaced by the conventional formulas of the target genre rather than translated literally. Typical correspondences are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Etiquette formulas of official correspondence and speeches: functional correspondences

English formula	Literal Uzbek translation (inappropriate)	Functional Uzbek equivalent
Dear Sir or Madam	Aziz janob yoki xonim	Hurmatli janob / xonim
Yours faithfully / Yours sincerely	Sizniki sodiqlik bilan	Hurmat bilan
I look forward to hearing from you	Sizdan eshitishni intizorlik bilan kutaman	Javobingizni kutib qolamiz
Please do not hesitate to contact us	Iltimos, biz bilan bog'lanishdan ikkilanmang	Savollaringiz bo'lsa, biz bilan bog'lanishingiz mumkin
We regret to inform you that...	Sizga xabar berishdan afsuslanamiz	Afsuski, sizga ... ma'lum qilamiz
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen	Taniqli mehmonlar, xonimlar va janoblar	Hurmatli mehmonlar, xonimlar va janoblar

A literal rendering produces Uzbek sentences that are grammatically correct but foreign to the genre; likewise, an English letter opening with elaborate wishes of health translated literally from Uzbek seems unusual in business. In J. House's terms, such texts require covert translation with a cultural filter [4].

Audiovisual constraints. Because of the space and time limits of subtitles [2], phatic expressions ("Hey", "Oh, come on", "Excuse me", "Sorry") are usually the first to be omitted, as the viewer perceives them from the soundtrack. Omitting address forms, however, may distort relationships between characters, so the choice of "sen" or "siz" should be maintained consistently. In dubbing, lip synchronisation often forces the replacement of short English formulas with Uzbek ones of similar length, which may shift their meaning.

Machine translation errors. Machine translation systems tend to render culture-specific formulas literally: "Osh bo'lsin" may be linked to the dish osh (pilaf), "Hormang" translated as a prohibition, "Break a leg" rendered literally and "Take care" as an instruction rather than a farewell. Being short, context-dependent and idiomatic, etiquette formulas remain a weak point, and human post-editing is necessary, especially in official and public texts.

The interpreter's role in face-to-face interaction. In liaison interpreting the interpreter is a participant, and etiquette expressions are often addressed to him or her directly: Uzbek hosts may thank, bless or invite the interpreter to the table, while English-speaking clients may expect a neutral, almost invisible channel. The interpreter coordinates the interaction rather than transmitting utterances mechanically [12]; a brief rendering of the main greeting and thanks, with polite maintenance of role boundaries, proved the most effective strategy.

DISCUSSION

The challenges have three main sources: structural differences between the languages (pronouns and honorific morphology), differences in cultural norms (religious formulas, blessings, ceremonial frames) and the conditions of translation activity (time pressure, subtitle limits, machine translation). Each calls for a different type of solution: linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge or professional strategy.

From the functionalist standpoint, an etiquette expression should be translated according to its purpose in the target text [8]. In business, official and everyday situations its purpose is a social action – to greet, to thank, to open or close a letter – and the translation should perform the same action by the conventional means of the target language, which corresponds to dynamic equivalence [7] and to the level of the purpose of communication in V. N. Komissarov's model [1]. In literary translation, where etiquette portrays the characters' world, a foreignising strategy [11] may be justified; thus the principle of preserving national colour [6; 10] should be applied selectively.

Unlike the written translator, the interpreter must decide instantly, and long ceremonial formulas may affect the rendering of subsequent content; a prepared repertoire of equivalents for typical situations – opening a meeting, a toast, a welcome, condolence – is therefore valuable.

Accordingly, translator training should include a module on etiquette expressions; a bilingual English–Uzbek database of etiquette formulas organised by situation would help practitioners and learners; interpreters should be briefed on the event before assignments; and machine-translated texts should be checked specifically for etiquette formulas.

CONCLUSION

Etiquette expressions present a significant challenge in English–Uzbek translation and interpreting, arising from asymmetric pronoun and honorific systems, religiously marked and culture-specific formulas, differences in ceremonial discourse and genre conventions, and the conditions of interpreting, audiovisual and machine translation. Literal translation usually leads to pragmatic inadequacy, and the most effective approach is to render etiquette expressions at the level of communicative purpose. The degree of preservation of cultural colour should depend on the type of text: functional adaptation in business and everyday communication, foreignisation in literary translation. Further research could involve a corpus study of published translations and an experimental study of interpreters' strategies.

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