

## DIFFICULTIES IN POETRY TRANSLATION

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### ABSTRACT

Poetry is a separate world where the feelings of a poet and his or her heartfelt expressions reside. By means of the correspondence of meaning, word choice, rhyme, rhythm, and some other poetic devices in the poem a poet intends to express his or her ideas of a certain thing or a situation, experiences they or other people had, humane feelings such as love, revulsion, admiration, friendship, faith as well as descriptions of certain things or some circumstances they may experience. Poems could be written in different languages throughout the world but they carry certain meanings and purposes which are tended to be universally understood regardless which language they were written in. Following some points proposed by Hariyanto (no date) the writers try to give examples how to translate English poems into Uzbek, especially in how to handle the translation from the point of view of aesthetic values, expressive values, collocation, poetic structure, metaphorical expression, sounds. Indonesian translation is sometimes used to make the points clear.

**Key-words:** *translation, aesthetic values, expressive values, collocation, poetic structure, metaphorical expression, sounds*

Having been holding an important place in the lives of the people throughout history and across cultural and national boundaries, poetry is a separate world where the feelings of a poet and his or her heartfelt expressions reside. By means of the correspondence of meaning, word choice, rhyme, rhythm, and some other poetic devices in the poem a poet intends to express his or her ideas of a certain thing or a situation, experiences they or other people had, humane feelings such as love, revulsion, admiration, friendship, faith as well as descriptions of certain things or some circumstances they may experience. Poems could be written in different languages throughout the world but they carry certain meanings and purposes which are tended to be universally understood regardless which language they were written in. In this case, we need the help of a translator who can keep the meaning of the poem in its translation

in another language as it was in the original one. Nevertheless, many translators face difficulties and have problems when translating a poem.

In the current article, I am also going to shed light on some problematic issues that are common in poetry translation. Specifically, more emphasis will be put on the word choice and rhyming problems.

According to Hariyanto (no date), poetry translation should be semantic translation for a poem is typically rich with aesthetic and expressive values. As the professor claims, a translator of poetry may face the linguistic, literary, aesthetic, as well as socio-cultural problems during his engagement in translation. Linguistic problems may include the collocation and hidden logic which is also called to be non-standard syntactic structure. As for the translation of the collocations, the translated

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version of the poem should not look awkward to the reader: usually in the English language we say “to make a speech” and not “to say a speech” or “to run a meeting” and not “to do a meeting” and so forth. One thing to keep in mind is that collocations do not really tend to be similar in different languages; conversely, they are differently made and may be used in different ways to mean totally different expressions.

However, it also differs in the English language also. For instance, the word “run” can give several different meanings, such as in the collocation “to run a company/inn/café”, etc. the interpretation is not something like “to get engaged in a physical activity like running” but it will be correct to say “to govern or to own a company/inn/café”.

Another point to consider in term of linguistic matter is the obscured or hidden (non-standard) syntactic structures. Such kinds of structures may be written in a poem on purpose as a part of the expressive function of the text. For this reason, these kinds of organizations should be rendered as closely as possible.

As Hariyanto states, the first step to deal with this problem is to find the deep (underlying) structure. According to Newmark (1981: 116), the useful procedure is to find the logical subject first, and then the specific verb. The most important matters are these factors only. Once we discover those two elements, the rest will fall into place. After that the translator can reconstruct the structure in the target language as closely as possible to the original structure.

Mr. Hariyanto also claims that some certain factors that cause hardship in translating poetry are aesthetic and literary problems. They are related to poetic structure, metaphorical expressions as well as sounds. These aesthetic values do not carry an independent meaning, but they are correlative with the various types of meaning in the text. This means that if the translator destroys the word choice, word order, and the sounds, he or she spoils the beauty and the expression of the original poem. Gracefulness, gentleness, for example, will be ruined if the translator provides unsophisticated alliterations for the original carefully-composed alliterations. An

English version of an Uzbek poem can be taken as an instance here:

### ***You are my holy shrine***

*Poetry - my holy place, my worshipping shrine,  
Full of poison and honey – precious soul of mine,  
You are my sorrow and hope, agony and  
delights.*

*My modest inspiration at my sleepless nights.  
Without you I don't need gem or treasure,  
No need for a beauty, or a pleasure.  
Without you for me life is blank too,  
May no moment of my life pass without you!*

The Uzbek version of the above provided poem that is a dedication for poetry was written with adequate elegance and delicacy that a reader may effortlessly comprehend how the writer feels about poetry. However, the translator strived to utilize more close words in case he was not able to find the exact translation of a particular word or phrase. The Uzbek version is available here as a proof:

### ***Ka'bamsan***

*Ka'bamsan she'riyat ezgu ehromim,  
Og'u ham bol to'liq bebaho jonim.  
Alamim va ishqim, umid-u armon,  
Uyqusiz tunlarim jindek ilhomim.  
Kerakmas inju ham, sensiz haqiq ham,  
Kerakmas shaddod ham, sensiz daqiq ham!  
Hayot ham men uchun sensiz bema'ni,  
Sensiz o'tmasinda hatto daqiqam.*

Here is the direct amateur translation of mine in the Indonesian language just to be more understandable for the reader:

### ***Anda tempat suci saya***

*Puisi - tempat suci saya, tempat  
doa menyembah,  
Penuh racun dan madu - jiwa yang  
berharga saya,  
Anda kesedihan saya  
dan harapan, penderitaan dan kesenangan.  
Saya sederhana inspirasi di malam  
hari tidur saya.  
Tanpa kalian, aku tidak perlu permata  
atau harta karun,*

Tidak perlu untuk keindahan, atau kesenangan. Tanpa Anda bagi saya hidup adalah kosong juga, Mungkin tidak saat hidupku berlalu tanpa Anda!

Now, let's make a comparison of the translated and original versions of the poem. First of all, the title of the poem itself gives the image of something that is valuable and dear to the poet. However, there is no one-word English equivalent of the word "ka'ba" (*ka'bah*) that means a holy place or shrine a person may worship to. Specifically, the word "ka'ba" means the shrine in Mecca which is visited by the Muslim pilgrims once a year. Someone may suggest, in that case, the title should not be translated; however, the translator could find the possible closer equivalent and it could be suggested this way also. Nevertheless, some words like "*jindek ilhomim*" (*sedikit inspirasi*) were translated more professionally in the target language than the original version. As an equivalent to the word "jindek" which means "a little or small" in the English language, I used the word "modest" instead of translating it directly. "*Jindek ilhom*" (*sedikit inspirasi*) means "a small amount of inspiration" in English; however, the translator translates it as "*modest inspiration*" (*direct translation: sederhana inspirasi*) which adds more beauty to the translated version of the original work. All that matters is the reasonableness of the translator to deliver the information to the reader in a clear and understandable way keeping the aesthetic values as well as the poetic structure.

According to Hariyanto (no date), poetic structure includes the plan of the original poem as a whole, the shape and the balance of individual sentences in each line. Metaphor is related to visual images created with combinations of words, which may also evoke sound, touch, smell, and taste whereas sound is anything connected with sound cultivation including rhyme, rhythm, assonance, onomatopoeia, and so forth. A translator cannot ignore any of them although he may order them depending on the nature of the poem translated.

According to Said, finally, the socio-cultural problems in translating poetry exist in the phrases, clauses, or sentences containing word(s) related to the four major cultural categories, namely: ideas, behavior, product

and ecology. The "ideas" include belief, values, and institution; "behavior" includes customs or habits; "products" include art, music, and artifacts, and "ecology" includes flora, fauna, plains, winds, as well as the weather. As an example, Said shows the first stanza of Shakespeare's Sonnet XVIII:

*Shall I compare thee with a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;*

*Direct Indonesian translation*

Haruskah saya membandingkan engkau  
dengan hari di musim panas?  
Engkau lebih indah dan lebih beriklim  
Angin kasar lakukan mengguncang tunas Sayan  
dari Mei,  
Dan sewa musim  
panas telah semua tanggal yang terlalu  
pendek;:

Here, the description of summer serves as a symbol of beauty which gives the image of the gracefulness of the girl being described because "summer" implies a distinguished beauty for temperate countries. However, the cultural equivalents or near equivalent of "summer" does not mean so for some countries with hot climate. And to translate any expression containing such words, the translator should consider every single expression carefully in term of the importance and expressiveness. As Peter Newmark (1988) claims in the above mentioned case the translator does not have any choice; he has to supply the cultural equivalent in the target language. He suggests that the translator should let the reader learn and understand what a certain word means for others in the other part of the globe. Actually, "summer's day" is a day when the sun shines brightly and the flowers, especially the sweet-scented roses are blossoming everywhere in England as William Shakespeare expressed in his sonnet. Meanwhile, "summer's day" in other countries with rather burning weather means suffering of life where irrigation channels are dried up and the sand scatters everywhere. Nonetheless, later, the reader who resides in the part of the globe with a hot

climate will learn the beauty described with the description of “summer” when he or she discovers that the poem was written by an Englishman.

However, there are a number of other cases that some professors and specialists consider translating poetry to be difficult and there might be some other cases that make translation really a problematic issue for the translator, in their views. For instance, according to William R. Schmalstieg, a professor of the Pennsylvania State University, the difficulty of translating poetry is twofold: the words and meaning on the one hand, the flow and rhythm (or rhyme) on the other. As he claims in his article, most translations of poetry are really bad. One can find no rhythm or rhyme in such “professional” works of translation. This is mainly because the translator knows the foreign language too well and his or her language too poorly or vice versa. Additionally, their grasp of both languages may be limited to the writing of academic and formal papers whereas the procedure of translating a work of poetry requires rather literal and sometimes colloquial language.

According to Nosirjon Juraev, a promising Uzbek poet, a translator needs to possess an aptitude for poetry and must feel and understand the language of poetry as well. For instance, if a professional specialist of the English language is given a poem to translate, he or she may not be able to find a matching word or a phrase in the language being translated into for his or her language skills were limited to other aspects of the language or they may simply lack talent for poetry. Moreover, after a common reader reads his or her translation and gets nothing out of it, this shows that the translator’s efforts were in vain. Therefore, only mastering a foreign language does not suffice to translate a poetry work; instead, the translator must be aware of some certain words or phrases which can give totally different meanings in poetry. Furthermore, the translator sometimes needs to use more precise word or phrase in order to make up the rhyme or to keep the original meaning of the poem. Conversely, the translator may sometimes need more general word or phrase to make his or her translation more beautiful and an effective one. For this reason, the translator may make

omissions as well as additions in his or her work. Specifically, as an amateur translator, I also frequently make use of insertions and omissions in my translations differently from the original work of poetry. Nonetheless, I always strive not to lose the originality of the poem but to keep its original meaning in its translated version as well. Another difficulty which I mostly experience while translating poems from Uzbek into English is choosing an appropriate word which can be the best equivalent in the translated version of the poem. I consider that this question at issue is a common problem for all the translators. To be more specific, readers of poetry often come across such occurrences in translated works. An English translation of an Uzbek poem translated by Qosim Ma’murov, an English language professor and translator in Uzbekistan can be shown as an appropriate example for the statements above:

### ***Spring***

*Up the tender crops jump  
from joy,*

*Throw their hats into the sky high.*

*The lazy wind lay embracing still,  
The fragrance of Mint’s beloved girl.*

*The tulips blaze sparkling*

*The joys fall tick-ticking.*

*In the embrace of green feeling*

*I wish I were a tulip flaming.*

www.translate.google.co.id website  
translation:

### **Musim Semi**

Tanaman lembut melompat dari sukacita,  
Lempar topi mereka ke langit tinggi.  
Angin malas berbaring memeluk masih,  
Keharuman gadis tercinta permen itu.

Tulip kebakaran berkilau  
Kegembiraan yang jatuh tik-berdetik.  
Dalam pelukan perasaan hijau  
Saya berharap saya adalah tulip menyala.

This is a sample translation work of an Uzbek poetess Uktamoy Kholdorova’s poems

collected in her book named "My Heart is Weeping" printed in India.

Here is the original version of the above provided poem:

### **Ko'klam**

*Sevinchdan irg'ishlar maysalar  
Qalpog'in osmonga otadi.  
Yalpizning erka qiz hidini  
Tanbal yer quchoqlab yotadi.  
Porillab yonadi lolalar  
Shodliklar chakillab tomadi  
Yam-yashil tuyg'ular bag'rida  
Lolaga aylansam qaniydi.*

Here, the reader is suggested to pay attention to the word "tender crops" in the first 7. line. The reader may get surprised by the translator's word choice here. He translated the 8. word "maysalar" (*rumpud muda*) which in 9. reality means "newly grown grass" as "tender crops" which means "young, soft or delicate harvest" (*muda, panen, lembut atau halus*). It is alright to use the word "tender" (*lembut*) as an adjective before the word "grass" (*rumpud*) to describe how delicate, fragile, and immature it looks but using it with the word "crop" (*tanaman*) is obviously a mistake; moreover, one would probably consider it to be a blunder. The translator could have used another word such as *verdure, greenery, young grass, or sprouts (kehijauan, hijau, rumpud muda, atau kecambah)* as an English equivalent to the word "maysalar" (*young grass - rumpud muda*) rather than using the word "tender crops" (*lelang tanaman*). Actually, the word "crop" has the following meanings in the English language as written in the World Book Dictionary and Encyclopedia compiled by Thorndike Barnhart:

1. a product grown or gathered for use, especially as food:  
*Wheat, corn, and cotton are three main crops of the United States.*
2. **a.** the whole amount (of wheat, corn, or the produce of any plant or tree) that is yielded in one season or region:  
*The potato crop was very small this year. b.* the yield of some other product in a season:  
*The ice crop.*
3. anything like a crop: *a crop of lies.*
4. **a.** a clipping or cutting short of the hair. **b.**

clipped hair; a short haircut.

5. a mark produced by clipping the ears, especially of a domestic animal; earmark.
6. **a.** a baglike swelling of the esophagus of many birds where food is stored and prepared for digestion; *craw:*

*Fuel consumption is so great that most birds have a kind of carburetor called a **crop** for straining and preparing their food before it is injected into the combustion cylinders of the stomach and intestines (Atlantic).*

**b.** a similar organ in other animals or in insects: *The honey sac of a bee is called a **crop**. The earthworm empties the food into the crop, which is a storage chamber from which the food is released in small portions to the gizzard (A.M. Winchester).*

- a.** the handle or stock of a whip. **b.** a short whip with a loop instead of a lash: *a riding **crop**.*
- an entire tanned hide of an animal.
- Mining.* an outcrop of a vein or seam.

We have considered almost all the meanings of the word "crop" above; however, we could not find the very meaning we have been searching for. This means that the translator made a mistake and the editor of the book was not aware of that mistake. Also in the third and fourth lines of the poem there are some mistakes. We can effortlessly notice them at a single look: "...Yalpizning erka qiz hidini Tanbal yer quchoqlab yotadi..." Here is its translation: "...The lazy wind lay embracing still, The fragrance of Mint's beloved girl..." "... Angin masih malas berbaring memeluk, Keh aruman gadis tercinta Mint ..." The word "still" (*masih*) is an insertion here; however, by using this extra word which was not included in the Uzbek version, the translator did a good job in order to make the meaning clearer and more understandable to the reader. Nevertheless, there is a big mistake in that line which totally changed the meaning of the statement written in the Uzbek version. It is the word "wind" which did not exist in the Uzbek version. Actually, it should have been "earth or ground" which means "yer" (*tanah*) in Uzbek, not "wind" which means "shamol" (*angin*) in the Uzbek version. This may be a simple typo (a mistake in typing) but there is another blunder in this line too: "...Yalpizning erka qiz hidini Tanbal yer quchoqlab yotadi..." Translation: "...The lazy

*wind lay embracing still, The fragrance of Mint's beloved girl...*" This shows that the translator is probably not aware of the language of poetry or he did not understand what the poetess really wanted to mean. Here, the poetess used symbolism and she probably referred to how fragrant the mint was as she described it in an unusual way. This unusual description of the scent of mint made the poem sound more beautiful presenting a "food for thought". She actually did not mean a real girl who is a beloved one of the mint. If the poem is read in its original form in Uzbek, the reader gets totally different meaning of it unlike its translated form. The translator is definitely responsible for this mistake. This awkward, unconvincing, almost robotic English translation did a disservice to the original version.

The above mentioned mistakes and the problems in a single small poem are just a tip from an iceberg. All that matters in translating poetry is understanding what meaning each word conveys or connotes. Here is my own translation of Muhammad Yusuf's poem titled as "Hazil" ("Joke") which is also not free of omissions, insertions, or probably some mistakes:

### Joke

All the gossips are false about me,  
I have no self-control through and through.  
Imbibing wine is legacy to me by Khayyam,  
That man will get surely hurt if I do not do.

It's me who started; I will put the end,  
My friends vainly fret over loss of mine.  
If I happen to die before I turn forty,  
It's because of false girls, not because of wine!..

www.translate.google.co.id website translation:

### **Lelucon**

Semua gosip palsu tentang saya,  
Saya tidak memiliki kontrol diri melalui dan melalui.  
Imbibing anggur adalah warisan kepada saya  
oleh Khayyam,  
Orang itu akan pasti terluka jika aku tidak melakukannya.

Ini aku yang memulai, saya akan menempatkan akhir,  
Teman-teman saya sia-sia resah atas hilangnya tambang.  
Jika saya kebetulan meninggal sebelum aku berbalik empat puluh,  
Itu karena perempuan palsu, bukan karena anggur! ..

To be candid, it took me quite a long time to find appropriate words as well as proper rhymes for the above-written translation of the poem. I actually did my utmost to keep the originality of the poem: I also strived to keep the original meaning and utilize more literary words in this translation. The following poem is the original version in the Uzbek language:

### **Hazil**

*Mening haqimdagi g'iybatlar yolg'on,  
Ixtiyor o'zimdagi bo'lsa qaniydi.  
Sharob ichish menga Xayyomdan qolgan,  
Ichmasam ul zotning ko'ngli ranjiydi.*

*O'zim boshladimmi, o'zim qilgum bas,  
Do'slarim behuda zavolim izlar,  
Agar qirqaqqa kirmay o'lsam, may emas,  
Meni xarob etgan bevafo qizlar!..*

The word "imbibing" in the third line which is underlined may not be familiar to some people as it is not frequently used in our everyday speech. Actually, "to imbibe" is another word for "to drink" (*minum*). Here appears a good question: What is the use of using the word "to imbibe" rather than using its basic translation "to drink" which means "minum" in the Indonesian language? "To imbibe" is a literary word which can beautify the poem. If the translator wrote simply "to drink" the poem might look to be weaker in literary features. Moreover, in the fourth line the translator inserted the word "surely" (*pasti*) in order to make the statement look more determined. One can easily notice that he also made an omission (particularly a substitution) in the fourth line: "...Ichmasam ul zotning ko'ngli ranjiydi." – "...That man will get surely hurt if I do not do." "... *Orang itu pasti akan menyakiti jika saya tidak melakukan.*"

The translator did not translate the word "kalau aku tidak minum" as "if I do not drink/imbibe"; he just substituted that word to "if I do not do" because the "what-to-do" part was clear from the previous line. The same thing occurred in the following lines:

"...If I happen to die before I turn forty, It's because of false girls, not because of wine!.." –  
 "...Agar qirqa kirmay o'lsam may emas, Meni xarob etgan bevafo qizlar!.." "... Jika aku kebetulan meninggal sebelum aku berbalik empat puluh, Itu karena perempuanpalsu, bukan karena anggur! .."

In the above mentioned translated version of Muhammad Yusuf's poem, a reader may notice some changes in the meaning of the original version of the poem. This is because of the rhyming problems. As it is obvious, without rhyming words or rhythmic structures a work of poetry may look really boring or even meaningless. Such types of works may lack enthusiasm and an encouragement toward the reader to continue reading the work till the end with excitement. Since not all the words have exact equivalents in the target language, there will definitely be some alterations and substitutions in the translated form of a certain work of poetry. Moreover, more scrutiny should be paid on word choice in the poem. It is a crucially important factor in translating poetry. I would like the readers to pay attention and analyze the poem in term of word choice:

### Childhood

Once giggling on the hills  
 Playful girls had a fun.  
 They used to ask from me  
 If their scarves were gone.

Although I knew everything –  
 Their shawls were not gone,  
 I did not mind as it was  
 Nubile girls' act of fun.

www.translate.google.co.id website translation is as follows:

### Masa Kanak-Kanak

Setelah cekikikan di perbukitan

Gadis Playful telah menyenangkan.  
 Mereka menggunakan untuk meminta dari saya  
 Jika selendang mereka pergi.

Meskipun saya tahu segalanya -  
 Selendang mereka tidak pergi,  
 Aku tidak keberatan seperti yang  
 Gadis boleh kawin 'tindakan menyenangkan.

According to an Italian adage a translator is told to be a cheater. I also considered the meaning of that proverb and came to an agreement with that saying through my translations. Actually, a translator never tends to cheat the readers; however, some changes i.e., substitutions, insertions, omissions, as well as some other alterations in the translated versions which may possibly affect the original meaning of a certain literary work can prove this point of view. As it is obvious to everyone, especially to those who possess the knowledge of understanding and analyzing poetry translations it is considerably difficult to translate a poem into a foreign language. Moreover, it requires a plenty of time to carefully choose the right word which can clearly provide the idea of the original form in the translated version too. This means that a translator needs to be patient and possess the knowledge of literature as well as critical thinking on his own translations. Just in order to test your aptitude in poetry, specifically, in poetry translation, I would like to provide one of my translations here for you to have an attempt at translating:

Once among poppies  
 One beauty was asleep.  
 I wish I did not see her,  
 My heart started to weep.

She was asleep like a rose,  
 There was nobody to care.  
 I would pass not touching her,  
 But my horse stopped there...

### Famous Son

The son did not obey good words,  
 Mother – shocked. Father is nervous.  
 Neighs the horse at the stable  
 Ready for a long journey service.

Hands are shaking holding the rein,  
 Father's words are now in his eye:  
 - If you don't leave this year to school,  
 You will go then, don't you deny...

Disloyal son happy on the horse:  
 Studying makes wise always.  
 I don't care about cattle,  
 May they become prey to wolves...

He left leaving fields behind,  
 As well as his home on the hill.  
 Becoming a famed bard in town  
 Was the boy's inordinate will.

Some years passed. Still stooping  
 Old father feeds sheep and cow.  
 By the way, he had a naughty son –  
 He is famous in the town now.

**Anak Yang Terkenal**  
**(Translated by Widyawati Prayitno)**

Seorang anak tak patuhi perintah,  
 Lara ibu. Serta ayah.  
 Sayup-sayup ringkikan  
 Tandakan siap perjalanan panjang.

Tangan gemetar memegang kekang  
 Terbayang ucapan ayahnya.  
 Jika tak pergi mencari ilmu sekarang,  
 Pergilah kau di tahun depan.

Tak setia namun bahagia di atas kereta  
 Selalu bijak dalam membaca  
 Tak peduli pada semua  
 Walaupun jadi mangsa.

Ia pergi meninggalkan semua  
 Rumah serta bukit-bukitnya.  
 Keinginan yang tak biasa  
 Menjadi penyair terkenal di kota.

Tahun-tahun berlalu, ayah yang renta  
 Membungkuk menafkahi anaknya.  
 Sekarang anak yang tak setia  
 Terkenal di kota tak bernama.

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